

SOUTHWEST BULGARIA

SOUTHWEST
BUT GARRA



First Acquaintance



This piece of land is the highest part of Bulgaria which otherwise is simply a continent in miniature where alpine lakes and sunny beaches, curative hot springs and chilly caves, edelweiss heady precipices and subtropical rivers with lilies and lianas coexist. The average altitude of the country is 450 meters (300 meters for Europe



and 136 meters for Belgium) but the relief is very varied. No doubt mountains are the first eye-catching sight in this diversity of topographic features and miraculous workings of nature where measure is paramount.

RILA lies in the very heart of the Balkan Peninsula. It is a massif, not a range; the 2679.91 square kilometers are divided in four groups: Eastern (Moussala), Central, Northwestern (Malyovitsa) and Southwestern. Mount Moussala which is a pyramid when looked at from the north is a cupola from the west and south and a ridge from the east. It is the highest point in Bulgaria and in the Balkans. In general its 2925.4 meters make it the leader of the meridian.

Water is Rila's other asset. The abundant precipitation, impermeable rocks and geomorphologic features are the "parent" of countless



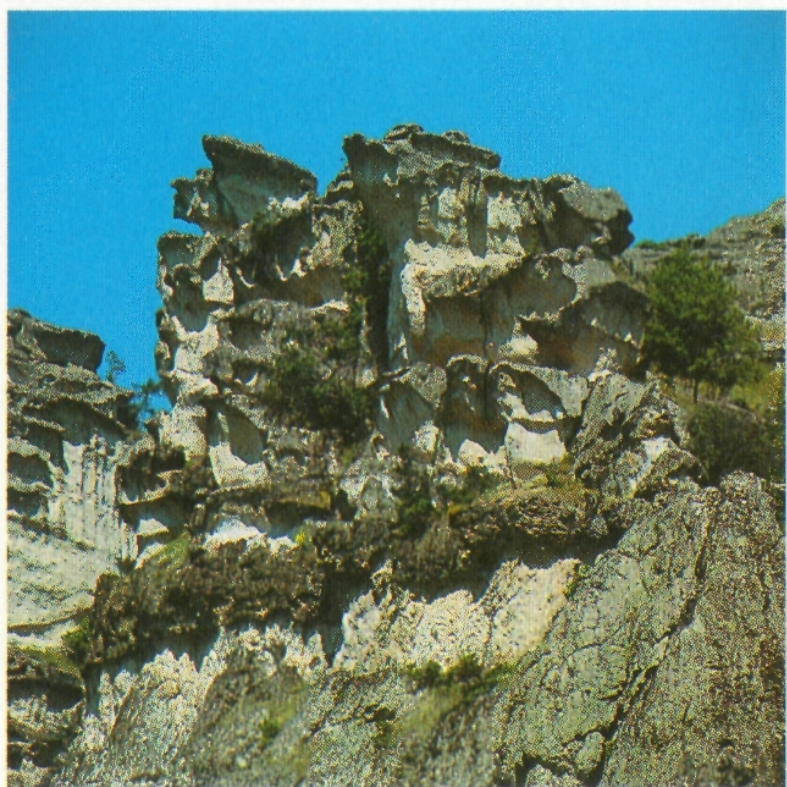
springs, brooks, rivulets, rivers, lakes and marshes. The main watershed in the Balkans dividing the Black Sea and the Aegean Sea water catchment areas runs along the ridge of the Rila Mountains. Iskur, the longest river flowing all the way in Bulgaria (373 kilometers) is the only water body that Rila contributes to the Black Sea (via the Danube whose tributary Iskur is). All other water bodies belong to the Aegean Region which covers 43% of the country's territory. The longest Bulgarian river, Maritsa (321 out of the 525 kilometer course via Bulgaria) also heads to the Aegean Sea.

PIRIN is perhaps the prettiest mountain on the peninsula. It is majestic and warm, stern and intimate, with motley joyous carpets and winds that crush down forest trees as if they were blades of grass, with pearl necklaces of hundreds of lakes and moraine valleys that look like battle fields in which giants had been throwing huge



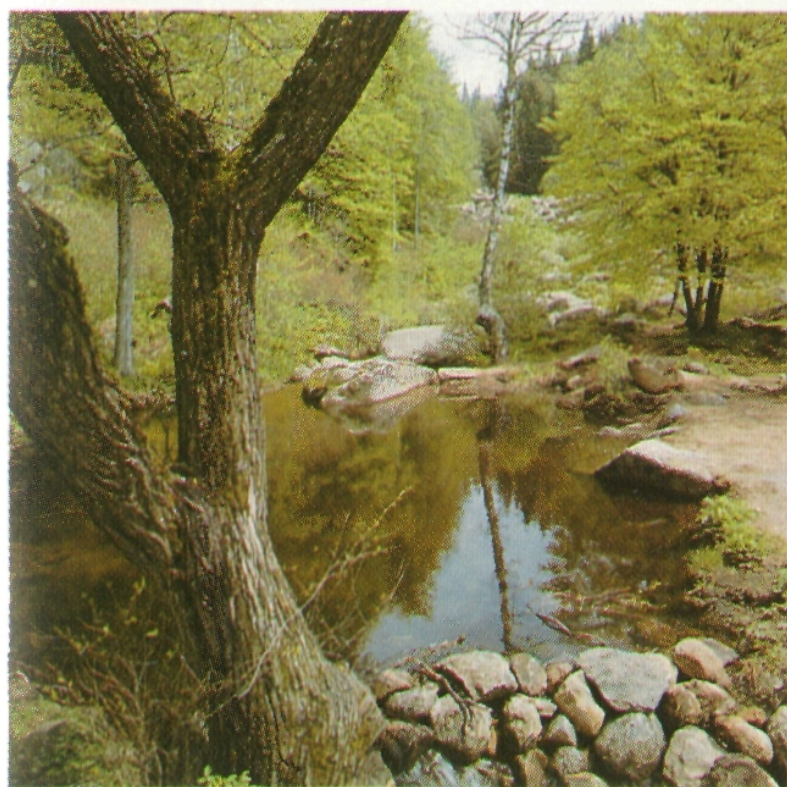
stones at each other. The mountain starts at the Predela saddle (altitude 1140 meters) which is a 7 kilometer long demarcation line between the two highest Bulgarian mountains and ends at the Parilska saddle (altitude 1170 meters). The massif is 80 kilometers long and 40 kilometers wide, sprawling on 2585 square kilometers in three clear-cut divides that the rivers Mesta and Strouma seem to girdle. The northern part is the longest (42 kilometers) and the highest; it comprises 74% of the area; all the lakes are in its cirques; the towering mounts are there. The average altitude of Pirin is 1033 meters; that altitude is below that of Rila but the mounts exceeding 2600 meters are twice as many and seven of them exceed 2800 meters. Over 170 lakes covering 1800 hectares are found in groups or alone from 2000 meters upwards as lasting traces of the Glacial Period. Lake Popovoto is the largest (123.6 hectares) and the deepest 29,5 meters).

VITOSHA is a real lung for Sofia. The mountain is younger than Rila and Pirin and a geomorphologic coeval of Sredna Gora. The southern part



abounds in karst: Douhlata is the largest cave in Bulgaria. The vegetation is really abundant: 2000 plant species or half the number in Bulgaria; of these 40 Balkan endemics. Ten species are vanishing and 25 species of rare plants growing in Vitosha have been entered in the Red Book. Strouma (Strymon in Antiquity) is the longest and biggest river that springs from Vitosha. It runs 290 kilometers on Bulgarian territory and 415 kilometers to the Aegean Sea. Strouma abounds in workings of nature: the picturesque gorges at Zemen and Kresna, serpentine meanders, razor-sharp steps, many fossil figures, roaring waterfalls, nature reserves and famous mineral springs in the river basin.

OSSOGOVO is not a massif but a group of mountains known under one name. Ossogovo is an irregular quadrangle which is 110 kilometers long and 50 kilometers wide. A quarter of it is on Bulgarian land. Rouen (2251 meters) is the highest peak; it is on the very border and lacks the majesty of the Rila and Pirin champions but the visibility range that it affords is 170 kilometers. The pastu-



res are as vast as they were in the times when they used to be the habitat of buffalos and wild bulls whose horns could be filled with 12 liters of wine. The Trojan kings had them embossed in silver and used them to drink wine from and not to store wine in!

For centuries these highlands were shaken by anti-Turkish revolts and the chemises of the men who had been hanged were embroidered to unfurl them as banners. The Kresna-Razlog uprising which was one of the longest events in the Bulgarian national liberation movement merits special attention. The scenario was conventional: initial success, tremendous enthusiasm, heroism on the part of everyone and ruthless suppression. The uprising broke out at daybreak on October 5, 1878 storming the Kresna Inns. A hundred



and nineteen Turkish soldiers and two officers were captured after an 18-hour fighting. The relentless struggle continued with unbending will and variable success till mid June 1879. The first phase liberated some fifty towns and villages in the valley of the river Strouma and the famous seven-day Free Land was established in Razlog district.

The region was closely involved in the organizations and preparations of the Ilindensko-Preobrazhensko Uprising in 1903. The records of that epic event of unparalleled heroism are: 239 battles of 26,000 insurgents with 350,000 Turks; 201 villages and 12,440 houses were consumed in the flames; over 5000 were massacred; 15,000 were imprisoned; 70,000 were left without homes.

The mountain recesses whose scenery would baffle even those who are hard baffle give shelter to THE MONASTERIES, which are one of the symbols of the Bulgarian spirit and the Bulgarian existence in



history. Their invariably important role was tangibly enhanced after Turkish domination was established in 1396. The state of Bulgaria was deleted from the maps of Europe in that year but the Bulgarian ethnic community survived. Assimilatory efforts clashed with the living cultural tradition which saved the national self-awareness and identity. Monasteries were repositories of ancient manuscripts and





of the memory of the nation; monks were the only men of letters in times when the feeling for the beautiful was cultivated by the church plate and primarily by the icons, the famous medieval Bulgarian icons, that made the late French Minister of Culture Andre Malreaux exclaim: "The history of world art needs to be rewritten!"

The Rila Monastery was founded in the first half of the 10th century which was a time when the Bulgarian state played a key role in political life in Southeast Europe and was famous



for its culture. The monastery was established during the Golden Age of Bulgarian statehood and enlightenment and has been in existence for over one thousand years, guarding and enriching the valuable national traditions. In hard times when lawlessness deprived the Bulgarian people of the privilege to be the maker of its own destiny, the monastery played the role of an informal ministry of education and culture and sort of a foreign ministry. The Rila Monastery maintained intensive foreign relations. An embassy visited

Ivan the Terrible in 1558; some hundred years later a delegation met the Russian czar Mikhail, the father of the Romanov dynasty. Relations with states near and far were good.

The Rozhen Monastery is a unique and completely authentic Revival period reserve, a real intermediary in the cultural relations of the Balkan peoples throughout the centuries. The holy altar is a lace of intermingling patterns and the metaphor can be extended to the traditions of medieval Bulgarian art and art tendencies from other cultural centers like Athos. The Khalkidiki Peninsula is one of the



prettiest in the Aegean Sea with three arms the eastern of which is called Mount Athos or the Holy Mount. The foothills arise out of the shore itself. Twenty monasteries are nestled in the folds of the mount: Zographou is the Bulgarian, Pantaleimon the Russian, Hilandar the Serbian and Iveron the Georgian monastery.

The refectory on the second storey of the Rozhen monastery's southern residential wing is a must. The location is unique. As a rule refectories are either at some distance or on the ground floor. Refectories with paintings were few in the Eastern Orthodox world, mainly in Georgia, Cappadocia and Albania, or at least scholars are familiar with few. Today such paintings can be seen in Mount Athos and nowhere else but for the Bachkovo and Rozhen Monastery, both in Bulgaria. The 16th century paintings can be counted as some of the best examples in that century when the excellence of 14th century art was re-introduced. The Last Supper, a permanent



juxtaposition of the monks communal table and the sacrament, is the central scene. The motif was recurrent starting from the earliest monasteries in the East and the West to Leonardo da Vinci's famous fresco in Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milano.

Southwest Bulgaria endowed European art with two of the four schools of art named after the towns of origin: Tryavna, Debur, Samokov and Bansko. Within less than a century the Samokov school produced dozens of unsurpassed icon painters, artists and carvers and the first engravers, all in all four generations from three unrelated families. It was an art which moved forwards at a slow but persistent pace and away from love for the celestial to love for the terrestrial, from death to life, from religious mysticism to genuine humanism, from the unreal to a lovely renaissance.

Hristo Dimitrov was the founding father of the Samokov school. As an icon painter his name was first entered in the contakion of the Metropolitan Church in the town in 1791. In his old days he moved to Mount Athos and a year before he died, he painted in the Rila Monastery. The intervening period of fifty years was given to a successful and impressive career. His two sons, Dimiter and Zahari

(born in 1810), the latter is perhaps the best known of the Zographi, followed in their father's art. Four of Dimiter's sons of who Stanislav Dospevski (1823-1878) is the best known became artists. It was not skill and technique, it was the suggestion of greatness of mind and down-to-earth philosophy that underpinned the eternity of what the Samokov thinkers created with their brush and chisel.

The 19th century endowed Bansko with a multitude of masters, icon painters, builders and carvers. The local painting school which chimed in with the Renaissance gained fame around as far as Belgrade. The founding father Toma Vishanov-Molera, was the first to demonstrate the transition from the self-confidence of the icon painter to the self-confidence of the artist. Somehow he managed to bring the two world outlooks, the Eastern and the Western, in one; he tried to revitalize the aesthetic components of religious art but, regrettably, ignored the fact that common perception was not that advanced. Despite the bitter experience his artistic heritage has all the features of art which goes beyond the confines of local painting. The icon painters from the Molerov family had a graceful line; their colors are delicate and magnificently blending. They were success-



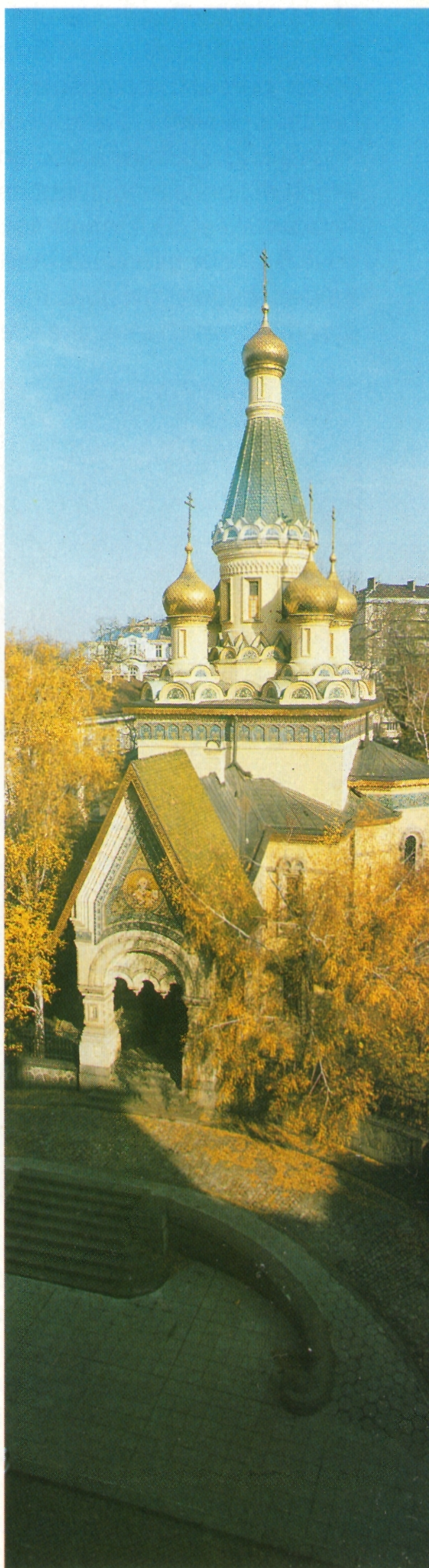
ful with the oil tempera and dyes which enabled them to explore and expand the gradation of tones, to grade chiaroscuro and to model the form which was not typical of the fresco or tempera technique. This book will familiarize you with the largest city and the smallest town in Bulgaria. This will give you an opportunity to feel the unique atmosphere of the capital of Bulgaria and its attraction power in the unity of the wisdom of the past and the pulse of the present day. It seems to be a God-chosen place with natural and convenient roads to rivers and seas around and to Europe and Asia, with fertile fields that are guarded and girded by mountains, with mineral springs, as many as 44, that spout forth abundantly, as much as 268 liters per second, the temperature range being 19-81°C.

The city's coat of arms is a shield divided into four fields. One of the fields features the goddess Julia Domna, the patroness of cities. On her right-hand side is the Church of St Sophia. On the second row is Mount Vitosha which is as inseparable from Sofia as Vesuvius is from Naples. The last of the fields features a temple of Apollo, the patron of curative waters. The lion is in the middle for it is the coat of arms of Bulgaria's capital. The motto on this coat of arms is "It grows but never ages". The ancient city's area was 0.017 square kilometers; around the Liberation it was 2.27 square kilometers, on the eve of World War II - 57 and today it is more than 130 square kilometers. The population growth was very swift, about a hundredfold over the past hundred years or so. On the eve of the Liberation Sofia had 12,000 inhabitants, fewer than Plovdiv or Rousse which were



epitomes of relations with Europe and the modern world. On the eve of the Great Depression Sofia had 168,000 inhabitants. Today the figure is 1,111,476 which is quite a big percentage of the country's population of 8,428,006 of who 4,732,866 are able bodied. Sofia is the largest and most important industrial center in Bulgaria. With 80% of the country's intellectuals it is the center of Bulgarian culture.

Bulgaria was the rear and the logistic base of the Macedonian liberation movement and the capital city was the natural motor of this movement. In fact the movement had two wings: the Internal Macedonian Odrin Revolutionary Organization which brought together the regions under domination on the basis of an ideology which cherished firm confidence in the potentials of the nation and considered struggle as a long process of preparation; and the Supreme



Macedonian Committee which was a mouthpiece of the emigres and believed that unrelated operations should provoke intervention on the part of the great powers which would liberate the oppressed brothers. It was a real tragedy for the nation that the two wings failed to come to a compromise and instead plunged into a fratricidal war which eclipses any action movie.

The smallest Bulgarian town rests amidst gently rounded hills covered with vineyards and orchards and rising and falling, as if moved by an invisible hand, to form incredible precipices and pyramids which look like the Colorado Grand Canyon. This town is



a vision, a presentiment of great calmness and perfect beauty; from a distance it looks like a picture of the applique technique with a hundred or so houses with balconies which seem to have perched on the five fingers of a human hand, surrounded by the magnificence of sandstone and the stillness of rocks.

With its 300 or so inhabitants Melnik could be the smallest town in Europe. In bygone days though it was bustling with life, the babel of tongues of merchants of Venice, Dubrovnik, Genoa and Vienna in the streets and local beautiful women who wore clothes that were the latest cry of Paris fashions. Bulgaria's liberation from Turkish rule,

strange as it may seem, brought a dramatic development. The state border stripped the town of its middling role; wars, earthquakes and the phylloxera, the scourge of the vine, ruined the town. The 1300 houses and 70 churches were reduced to 93 and 2. One can imagine what it was like when the bells of all churches were ringing together on feast days and the pyramids were resounding.

The First Balkan War of 1912 liberated Melnik. It was one of the way-paving events in history, carving the present-day political map of the Peninsula and clearing the prospect of modern development. The main military operations were on the Eastern Theater where Bulgaria



had almost half a million strong army against the Turks (while Serbia had 190,000, Greece 120,000 and Montenegro about 30,000). Volunteer companies did the reconnaissance and liaisoning for the troops and even liberated major towns like Petrich, Bansko, the first free town in the Pirin region, Razlog, Kavalla and even Thessaloniki. It took the Bulgarian soldiers 22 days to reach the Aegean Sea and after an armistice which was longer than the war itself, stormed the famed fortress of Odrin (Edirne/Adrianople) that everyone believed was invincible for its 26 forts, 524 cannons and 70,000 Turkish bayonets but that this time surrendered.



This ancient country is really unknown. You are sure to like her and may wish to know more about her.

INTRODUCTION

Bulgaria lies in the northeastern part of the Balkan Peninsula. The country is 520 kilometers long and 330 kilometers wide as the crow flies, has a wide outlet on the Black Sea and the river Danube and convenient crossroad location between Europe and Asia. The country's territory of 111,000 square kilometers makes up about 0.08 per cent of the earth's land, one fifth of the territory of France or a speck on the globe or the map, if you like. The population is approximately 9 million, 8.6% of the Balkan Peninsula, 1.3% of Europe and 0.20% of the world, living in 237 towns and 14,424 villages. With 81 persons per square kilometer as against 38 on the Earth and 66 in Europe, the population density is relatively big or at least bigger than that in neighbour Turkey and Greece. The total length of the borders is 2245 kilometers of which 1181 are land, 686 kilometers are river and 378 kilometers are sea borders. Turkey, Greece, ex-Yugoslavia and Romania were, are and will be the neighbour countries. The climate is temperate continental and tends to be Mediterranean in the southern and coastal areas. The mean annual temperature varies between plus 14°C and minus 3°C; the highest temperature ever has been 45.2°C and the lowest – 38.3°C below zero.



Bulgaria's relief is very varied. Its characteristics is the alternation of the basic topographic features in the north-south direction. These descend from west-northwest to east-southeast. Hills and mountains are the predominant topographic features; almost three quarters of the physical map are yellow and brown; forests constitute 28 per cent of the territory. As you move south of the



Danube you can count more than one hundred valleys and hills before you reach the Valley of Roses.

Mountains take almost a quarter of the country's territory and largely determine the relief, agriculture, transport network and to an extent, the character of the Bulgarian. The 16 mountains in Bulgaria lend unique charm. The Balkan Range divides the country in two halves. The Balkan Peninsula derives its name from this biggest mountain. Like the Rhodopes, Sredna Gora and Vitosha, the Balkan Range has rounded summits which contrast the awesome rocky pinnacles of the Rila and Pirin mountains.

The Black Sea is a promising factor in future tourist projects. Its area is much larger than the territory of Bulgaria - 413,488 square



kilometers. The coastal line is 4090 kilometers, the average depth is 1130 meters and the greatest depth is 2245 meters. Because of the low content of salts, twice less than that in the Mediterranean and the Adriatic Sea, the sea water is very translucent. Its climate is mild and pleasant, the summer mean water temperature is 23°C. The beach is long, clean and the sand is fine and golden. Haze occurs seldom; there are no tides. Because below 150 meters the water abounds in hydrogen sulphide, wildlife is scanty but there are no sharks. The Bulgarian shore is high, with forests, picturesque and fertile. It abounds in big port cities like Varna and Bourgas, amazing small towns as if coming from an earthly dreamland like Sozopol and Nessebur; modern resorts like Albena, Sveti Konstantin, Golden Sands, Sunny Beach and Dyuni.



The real symbol of the country is

THE ROSE

To visit Bulgaria and not to go to the Valley of Roses is to go to Egypt and not see the pyramids. The Valley of Roses is in the heart of Bulgaria, around the river Toundja and shielded by the high slopes of the two mighty mountain ranges – the Balkan and Sredna Gora – hence, the unique climate. Perhaps that is why the Bulgarian rose which was transplanted here many centuries ago from Shiraz and which is the issue of the one-time Anatolian rose and the red damask rose feels so well here. The rose is the only flower appealing to all human senses. Taste a rose jam or a rose liqueur. But it is used mainly in rose oil distillery in which the Bulgarian tradition is world famous. Today a kilo costs almost two kilos of gold on the world markets. The unique harmony of chemical compounds and the 300 or so components produce the Bulgarian original natural rose oil which all the world's leading manufacturers buy exclusively. The valley is always beautiful but most charming in late May and early June when rose trees are in full bloom making the place a big sweet-smelling garden. It takes less than a month to pick the rose petals and requires many hands to do it for the season for picking is impossible to prolong. Picking starts not later than 4 o'clock in the morning when dewy petals are most fragrant and ends when the sun rises. It takes 3000 kilograms of rose petals to produce one kilogram of rose oil. One rose tree



has about 20 roses and a petal weighs 2 grams.

Curative water is another symbol of Bulgaria, in addition to the rose. There are over 500 hot springs all over the country and many towns owe their origins to them. Hot springs have varied physico-chemical properties, temperature and healing powers. Momin Prohod spa is comparable to Badgastein in Austria, Mihalkovo – to Vichy in France or Borzhomi in the Caucasus, Merichleri – to Karlovy Vary whereas Hissarya, Narechen and Velingrad are unique.

THE BULGARIANS

make up the bulk of the population. Women outnumber men by 60,000 and outlive them by five years. The Bulgarian women, it is generally acknowledged, are beautiful and of substance. The Bulgarian is a traditionalist which he was forced





to be. Otherwise he simply would not have survived. The traditions and mores some of which are unique, virtues and eternal memories are handed down from generation to generation. The three pivots of the Bulgarian soul are labour, the family and health. The word "health" is pronounced in cheers, thanks and greetings. The Bulgarians are the successors of Thracians, Slavs and Proto-Bulgarians. They formed the

ROOTS

The Thracians are the earliest recorded population in the eastern half of the Balkan Peninsula, in what is today Bulgaria. Judging from Homer's epic, the name Thracians appeared first in late 2nd millennium BC. The Thracians were a numerous people who loved freedom. They were scattered over a vast territory. Tacitus wrote thus: "They obeyed their kings even only if they wanted". Herodotus wrote that the Thracians courageously hurled arrows skywards, against thunder and lightning and threatened the gods. Florus describes how a chieftain of the tribe Moesians asked the armoured Roman legions on the first encounter: "Who are you?" The answer was: "We are Romans, the lords of the world!" The chieftain smiled and said: "You will be if you conquer us!" Throughout history the Thracians who were famous artisans did not invent their own alphabet and used the Greek characters. But

the people who endowed the world with Orpheus and Spartacus possessed an exceptionally original culture at a time when even the Sumerian civilization was at its dawn. With tradition intact and having assimilated the experience of others, that culture was the link between the East and the West.

The Slavs that settled in the Balkans were unwarlike people, land tillers and stock-breeders in the main, with some knowledge of metal working, carpentry, weaving and pottery. The Slav religion was polytheistic, with the supreme deity Perun and worship of Svarog, Dazbog and elves and mermaids. Though peaceful, the Slavs would defend their dignity. They had no regular army and in times of war all able-bodied people joined in. This explains why they were so numerous in campaigns – the army was the entire armed people. The Slavs settled in the lands to the south of the Danube in such large numbers that Byzantium largely lost control on most of the peninsula. The Slavicization of the Balkans played a definitely catalytic role promoting the development of relations of production and causing changes in the social system of Byzantium itself owing to which the Eastern Roman Empire outlived the Western by a millennium.

The Proto-Bulgarians appeared on the stage of history in the swirl of the Great Migration of Peoples, the common madness that





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destroyed the ancient world. Their homeland was somewhere at the foot of the insurmountable peak Khan Tengri, their divine king and god. The Proto-Bulgarians worshipped also the celestial bodies. Cult of the dead was common practice; the graves were decorated with stone carving which is characteristic of their art in general. They had a perfect lunar calendar to count the days of life which they did not treasure much.

Byzantine and Latin chroniclers describe the Proto-Bulgarians as freedom lovers and courageous and experienced soldiers accustomed to the hardships of camp life. In the 5th century Enodius exclaimed thus: "It is the people that had everything they wished, the people that bought a rank with the enemy's blood, that gained glory for the family on the battlefield for with them the more blood-stained the weapon in battle, the more noble the man. Neither mountain ranges, nor rivers, nor lack of food will withhold them for mare's milk is sufficient feast. Who could resist an enemy carried and fed by their fleet-footed animal!"

The Great Migration of Peoples that started in the second half of the 4th century tangibly spilt this ethnic group, not sparing the Proto-Bulgarian tribal alliance called Great Bulgaria, led by khan Koubrat. After his death some of the Proto-Bulgarians led by his son Asparouh moved westwards and c. 660 settled adjoining Byzantium. The union of Asparouh's Bulgars in 681 with the Slav tribes in Moesia laid the beginnings of the eventful history

of mediaeval Bulgaria for it created

THE STATE

Bulgaria is among the oldest states. Its 1300-year-long history had its ups and downs, dramatic defeats and triumphant victories, regional problems and universal human contribution. In general it developed under the influence of two major factors. First, it was the rivalry between the East and the West which culminated in 1054 when the two main centers of Christianity, Rome and Constantinople, separated. Second, it was relations with Byzantium which determined largely the political setup in the Balkans. Subjected to the strong influence of this rivalry small Bulgaria made a contribution of her own to world affairs, corresponding to her size and position. Two examples will be enough:

The impact on the East – the development of Russian statehood, sending missionaries for the Christian conversion of Russia where, in the 11th century, Old Bulgarian became the official language of the church and the state.

The impact on the West – the Bogomil heresy which persisted almost 500 years and which, as a matter of fact, advocated the democracy that was typical of early Christianity. The heresy spread all over Europe: the Cathari in Northern Italy, the Albigenses and Bugari in France.

The history of mediaeval Bulgaria falls into three periods: the First Bulgarian Kingdom (681-1018) with royal cities Pliska, Preslav and Ohrid; the Byzantine domination (1018-1187); and the Second Bulgarian Kingdom (1187-1396) with the royal city of Turnovo. Each period had its eminent personalities.

Khan Kroum was the first exceptional statesman. His foreign policy sought to unite the Slavs under foreign rule and to incorporate them to Bulgaria which was regarded by them as a natural political and ethnic center. Kroum made every effort to achieve internal political unity on the basis of laws that did not discriminate between Bulgars and Slavs.

Christianity was adopted in 865, under king Boris I; it was an exclusively political act whose purpose was to promote Bulgaria to the level of the then advanced countries, to standardize the material culture and religion of the two ethnic components and put the finishing touches to the formation of the Bulgarian nationality. Thirty years after, again under Boris I, a script based on the Slavonic language which was spoken by the overwhelming majority of the population, the Slavs, was introduced for state and church use. The disciples of Cyril and Methodius were cordially received in Bulgaria and carried out large-scale educa-

tional activities, using the alphabet and the literary heritage of the Slav preceptors.

Under king Simeon the Great Bulgaria became a mighty military, political, economic and cultural factor in the Balkans and a center of Slavonic letters. It was the source of strength and knowledge for then Slavdom. It was not accidental that Simeon's reign went down in history as the Golden Age.

Ever after the glory was attained only under king Ivan Assen II whose state had access to the Aegean, Black and Adriatic Sea and who regained independence for the Bulgarian church.

The Turks invaded the Balkan Peninsula in mid-14th century. The vast Ottoman Empire maintained unity and centralization by well developed social and political institutions in which Islam, the last monotheistic religion which evolved into a world religion, was paramount. For the very world Islam means submission (to the will of God). Unity and centralization were also maintained by a ruthless system of taxes. Of these the *devsirme* was the most cruel of all practices. From the 15th to the 18th century the Turks led away the strongest and healthiest Bulgarian boys, converted them to Islam and made them religious fanatics to the extreme. The elite janissary corps were recruited from such boys.

After Bulgaria's liberation from Turkish rule (March 3, 1878) Sofia was proclaimed the capital of the Third Bulgarian Kingdom. Small Bulgaria was involved in all armed conflicts in the Balkans and fought in the two world wars. There were several national catastrophes, the experiment with socialist development, the world techno-scientific revolution in its specific Bulgarian dimensions. Present-day Bulgaria is the product of all this that you will see. To feel comfortable you have to know some

LITTLE THINGS

that will spare surprise during your stay.

The Bulgarian "Yes" is your "No", turning the head from right to left. Don't be confused. And remember the Bulgarian monosyllables "Da" (Yes) and "Ne" (No). The nuances are easy to catch.

You will find the Bulgarian alphabet and language quite strange. But you can very well do without them. The staff at the tourist centers speak, as a rule, the main European languages; young people in the street usually speak some English and seldom French. The elderly people are better with German.

Office hours are 8.30 or 9.00 am to 5.30 or 6.00 pm with lunch break. We work from Monday to Friday; Saturday and Sunday are the weekend. Official holidays: January 1, March 3 – the National Day, Easter, May Day, May 24 – the Day of Cyril and Methodius and of Bulgarian Culture, Christmas – December 25.



Bulgarian Cuisine

If Bulgaria is unknown to you, the Bulgarian cuisine should be even less known. It'll be with you throughout your stay in Bulgaria and it's better to be a friend than an enemy. May we suggest an idea: have a Bulgarian cuisine party back home with the choices we have made. The Bulgarian national cuisine is very varied. Little wonder remembering the 30 or so peoples that crossed the Bulgarian lands and influenced beneficially the cuisine which is a variety of exotic and delicious dishes with untranslatable names and excellent taste. The origin of each dish is disputable. Stuffed leaves (sarmi) which the Bulgarians adore and their guests enjoy are said to be Turkish or Romanian. We think the ancient Greeks have handed it down to us because we read about this dish for the first time in a comedy by Aristophanes written in 425 BC. This is the recipe. Stew chopped onion in vegetable oil, add some water, tomato paste and paprika. Remove from the oven, add 300 grams of veal and 300 grams of pork, minced, half a glass of rice, black pepper, salt to taste, pour salty boiling water and stew as long as rice absorbs water. Prepare cabbage or sauerkraut leaves which are better, or vine leaves. Pour boiling water to make freshly picked leaves tender. Put a spoonful of filling on each leaf, fold like nappies, put in a pan, pour a glass and a half of water, cover with a lid and cook on moderate oven. Dress with fried butter and paprika before serving. Peppers, vegetable marrows, tomatoes can be stuffed in this way. But a hotch-potch of all this on a broad pan in oven beats it all.

THE PRINCIPLES

of the Bulgarian cuisine are simple: moderate oven, no pouring of water, stewing, not frying; the pots are sealed; a wide variety of ingredients is used; vegetable oils and fats depending on the dish; condiments are few and all this is put together to stew into its own juice and produce the bouquet.

CAUTION!

The Bulgarians eat a lot of bread, twice as much as the people in the developed European countries. Statistics of twenty years ago show 250 kilos per capita annually versus 107 kilos in France and 113 kilos in Austria, and much more than in the other Balkan countries. The Bulgarians worship bread, a practice handed down by the ancient Slavs. Bread was the epitome of all elements, life-giving forces of creation, hope for a good life and a life of dignity. Bulgarian food is salty so wait before you add salt.

The Bulgarians eat sour food which goes with yoghurt, salt of lemon, tomatoes, and vinegar which is not the vinegar that you know. It is red and contains tartaric, not acetic acid; it is made from

wine which is left to go sour and to which fragrances and conserving substances are added. The apple vinegar is best and smells pleasant.

The Bulgarian national cuisine is mistakably said to be chilly. The Arab, Turkish or Mexican cuisine is chilly. We serve separately chillies (caution!) and pickles. The Bulgarian chillies are less chilly than the “poisonous” cayenne pepper which is incredible.

The “motley salt” which is served in folkstyle restaurants together with the hot round loaves is chilly, too. It is prepared from dried paprika which is pestled, salt, savory, jasmine or mint, popcorn, pumpkin seeds.

The paprika which the Bulgarian cuisine uses a lot is made from special paprika varieties which are dried and ground. Sometimes different substances are added to the paprika. Don't store it for longer than a year because it loses colour and fragrance. Store it in dark and cool place, under a lid. Don't fry it in oil for it tastes bitter. Put it before the water is poured.

It is not true that the Bulgarian cuisine uses many spices. Some 80 out of the 350 spices in the world are used intensively whereas the Bulgarian cuisine uses very few. It is worth tasting them all, the more so that some are familiar – tarragon and basil.

Pythagoras called garlic “the king of spices” and the Bulgarians unconditionally trust him. You have to get used to it with any meals though the quantity and the way it is used are different from those in Europe. Garlic can be boiled or taken as it is, pestled for cucumber soup (tarator), aubergine puree (kyopoolu), onion-dressed vegetable marrows, aubergines, baked peppers and sauce. Fennel is a common spice. It was grown as early as 722 BC in the garden of king Marduk in Babylon. Onion however was plant Number One in the garden. Same with the Bulgarian cuisine. It is comparable only with parsley which was believed to help recovery and make men as strong as stone (the scientific name *petroselinum* derives from the Greek *petros* = stone). It is difficult to say whether this is the reason but a Bulgarian dish without parsley must be a mistake.

Savory is used with all dishes that are difficult to digest and dishes with mutton and lamb. Its scientific name *Satureia* derives from the ancient satyrs who were gluttonous. The bay-leaf of the holy tree whose branches were made into wreaths for the temples of Apollo and for victorious men in ancient times is also commonly used. Today its purpose is very humble: to make food savoury in combination with onion, garlic, allspice, vinegar and roots.

The Bulgarian cook always has at hand the caraway and the cummin which are perhaps some of the oldest spices in the world. Remains of caraway fruit have been found around lake dwellings

dated back to 3000 BC and in the tombs of pharaohs; the cummin is mentioned in the Bible. Celery is held in great esteem as it is believed it injects strength and virility which no one can tell for sure whether it's strength or weakness. It is noteworthy that the Corinthian capitals featured celery leaves and that celery garlands decorated the homes on wedding days.

Peppermint and its variety, the mint, is often used. Some authors think it was the first cultivated plant in Europe because there is not a wild variety. Pliny writes that this plant stimulates the brain activity, that is why ancient students had mint crowns on their heads to remember things. Vanilla and clove are the main fragrances in confectionery. A Bulgarian invention, clove oil extract, is an internationally known preparation, Maraslavin pyorrhoea combatant.

Since ancient times the Bulgarian cuisine has been famous for its

APPETIZERS

cold and hot. Green salads, boiled potatoes, beans, beet, mushrooms, baked peppers and aubergines are really very delicious and look great. There is an amazing variety of pickles: cabbage, cauliflower, cucumbers, carrots, peppers with garlic and onion.

SHOPSKA is the best known of the salads. It is easy to prepare it at home. The ingredients are not specifically Bulgarian: three or four tomatoes, a fresh cucumber, four or five paprikas – fresh or baked, an onion, vegetable oil, parsley and grated cheese. Cut tomatoes and cucumbers into cubes and paprikas into slices. Serve in a salad bowl with parsley and cheese sprinkled on top. Bulgarian brined cheese is available in any country in Europe.

The second salad is more pretentious and may become what your guests like best. The KYOPOOLU is a mess of aubergines. Bake two or three aubergines and four or five paprikas, stew in a non-metal vessel till cool. Unpeel, strain bitter juice and paste well. Add two or three finely cut tomatoes (in some districts tomatoes are not added), garlic pestled with oil and salt, and oil and vinegar to taste. Stir with a wooden spoon to prevent it from going dark. Paprikas and tomatoes can be replaced with mayonnaise. Dress with olives. Bulgarians appreciate vegetable dishes. Until recently the absence of meat was a sign of poverty; today it is a sign of gourmandise. The Bulgarian table knows a variety of dishes without meat. GYUVECH is a hotch-potch of baked vegetables; MISH-MASH is a mixture of baked peppers, cheese, eggs and tomatoes; stuffed vegetable marrows and aubergines; eggs with green onion, gruel. They all are incredibly delicious. One such dish is imambayalda

which translates as “the imam (priest) swooned”, so delicious it had been.

THE SOUP

is an invariable lunch starter. Take care though: sometimes the hosts serve appetizers and the soup so lavishly and the hospitality at a Bulgarian home is so inviting that you are full and unable to taste the second course of which the hostess is very proud and touchy. The soup allows boundless inventiveness. The invariable spring time ingredients are the early leaf vegetables: nettles, spinach, orach, dock, sorrel. If the second course is dark, the soup is light; if the second course contains potatoes and peas, the soup is without vegetables; if there is pastry, there is no vermicelli in the soup. Beat an egg with milk and flour in the soup. The thickener is cold if put immediately after taking the soup from the oven or boiled, which is more usual. The egg is beaten into milk or yoghurt and some flour to obtain gruel which is stirred into the stock.

Bulgaria is the home of yoghurt and *Bacillus bulgaricus* and Number One in the world in yoghurt production. It is omnipresent on the table usually as TARATOR. The preparation is simple: beat half a kilo of yoghurt which is more diluted and less fat than that sold in Europe; cut two cucumbers into cubes, peeled or unpeeled, add garlic which has been pestled, walnuts and salt. Mix with yoghurt but don't add water because the cucumbers give off their sap. Serve with ice cubes, sprinkled abundantly with fennel and a few drops of vegetable oil.

Anyhow,

THE MAIN COURSE

usually contains meat. Here is one which is easy to prepare, KAVARMA. Stew 600 grams of pork and 300 grams of veal liver in half a glass of oil and add four or five onions, better leeks and boil. Put in a pot, add a glass of mushrooms, several peppers, one or two tomatoes, half a glass of white dry wine and some boiling water. Spread dough over the lid and cook in moderate oven. Sprinkle parsley before serving; in some districts in Bulgaria they stir an egg or two on the top and bake it again for a minute.

The Bulgarians eat a lot of meat. The numerous beer-and-grill huts serving beer with meat prepared differently and roasted on charcoal and grate are an exclusive Bulgarian invention. The appetizing smoke is your introduction to the local cuisine. The KEBAPCHE and SHISHCHE are liked best. Here is the secret of preparation. Chop tender pork for the shishche. Salt, mix with

onion and condiments like pepper, cummin, savory and leave in a cool place for a couple of hours. Push a skewer through the meat, alternating with onion, bacon, pepper and tomato. Roast and sprinkle with lemon before serving.

Kebapche preparation: salt mixture of minced pork, mutton and veal, roll intensely and leave for a couple of hours. Add the same condiments. Pour water as much as it will take, gourmets prefer soda water which makes the kebapches "jump" on the grate. Roll into "cigars" 3 centimetres in diameter and 10-12 centimetres long. Roast on grate lined with oil. Serve with any dressing whose compulsory ingredient is finely cut onion mixed with parsley, the onion about which Herodotus wrote that gives strength and prevents ailments. It will be unforgivable to forget.

THE DRINKS

for Bulgaria is a renowned exporter to more than 70 countries of wine in the main and grows 300 vine varieties. Apparently Bulgaria is the only country celebrating a Vine Growers Day, the Day of Trifon Zarezan, when a procession of people in their Sunday clothes go to the vineyards to prune the vines, an ancient ritual, in viticulture regions. Wine-making in Bulgarian lands is a millennial tradition. It was associated with the Thracian cult of Dionysus who originally was a popular deity of infinite creation and ever renewing nature. The Dionysian cult was also associated with Orpheus, a Thracian singer, augurer and healer who most probably is not a fictitious character. It is very likely that the Thracians were unsurpassed in vine-growing and wine-making owing to the Dionysian cult. And if there is scanty historical evidence about certain things, there is corpus of material about this ancient tradition. Pliny the Elder tells us that we owe the vine cultivation to Eumolpus, the creator of Plovdiv. The ancient geographer Strabo insists that the vine is a Thracian invention. Homer likewise praises Thracian wine.

There is a variety of excellent wines. The GUMZA (from Souhindol, Pavlikeni and Novo Selo) is similar to Burgundy. It is jokingly recommended as a substitute of any blood group in blood transfusion. The MAVRUD tastes like Bordeaux. It is made from grapes separated from the stems for they absorb part of the spirit of the fermentation substance. It is strange that treading grapes in the vats produces a 10 per cent higher extraction than the modern grapes presses. The wine thus obtained is aromatic, thick and dark, the drink of gourmets. The MELNIK wine tastes like Malaga. It is the wine drunk by men who want to have a baby girl. It is made in Melnik which is perhaps the smallest town in Europe with its 300

inhabitants. The wine is made from a local vine with small grapes; the skin is thick and the grapes not pleasant to eat. But a unique dark red, thick, heavy and dry wine is made from it. In the past caravans of camels took this wine as far as Egypt, Venice and Madrid. The cellar of Kourdopoulov's house in Melnik is a three-level labyrinth in a rock, the total length being several kilometre and the storage capacity being 400,000 litres of wine. A rosé called PAMID resembles some of the Beaujolais Nouveau varieties. As to white wines, drink TAMYANKA or DIMYAT which is liked even better. Perhaps the best wines of this type are made in Varna and the craft and trade are to be traced in the remote past. In 1656 the famous Turkish traveller and scholar Evliya Chelebi wrote about "the chain of hills covered with reddish earth to the west of the city. There are 10,000 vineyards there". In 1850 the French ambassador in Persia, visited Varna on his way home and expressed his admiration: "Better grapes cannot be found even in France."

The MUSCADELS (from Soungourlare or Karlovo) are similar to the Moselle wines. The wormwood wines are very delicate, with a specific flavour. The OSMARSKO is the best wormwood wine. The herb it is made from was worshipped by the ancient Celts as the mother of all herbs. Some of the labels are familiar to you: Cabernet, Riesling, Pinot Noir and Sauvignon.

Salads usually go with brandy made from grapes or plum. The best brands are EVKSINOGRADSKA, SLIVENSKA PERLA, ROUSSENSKA BISSERNA, POMORIISKA, TROYANSKA. Bulgarian brandy is not blended like the whisky where you mix a variety of types and the good blend comprises at least 15 components added in strict succession. The Bulgarian brandy is weaker and palatable, around 38°, though in some regions, particularly in the Valley of Roses, the preparation is similar to that of the onetime highlanders: you put powder in the drink and if the mixture will burn, the alcohol may be said to be enough. Good brandy is made in environment-friendly, hilly or mountainous regions where nature improve it. Good brandy is at least three years old. Bracing air, crystal-clear water, oak casks where the drink matures (traditionally one of the planks is mulberry wood) put the finishing touch.

The cognacs served with coffee are excellent. PLISKA is the most preferred one. Ironically the best known Bulgarian cognac was named after the city in which the great Bulgarian khan Kroum passed his cruel law against wine-making and ordered to uproot vines to prevent drunkenness eleven hundred years ago. PRES LAV and POMORIE are even better and EUXIGNAC is unsurpassed. Naturally, the places with a choice clientele serve the popular European drinks.

CHEERS!

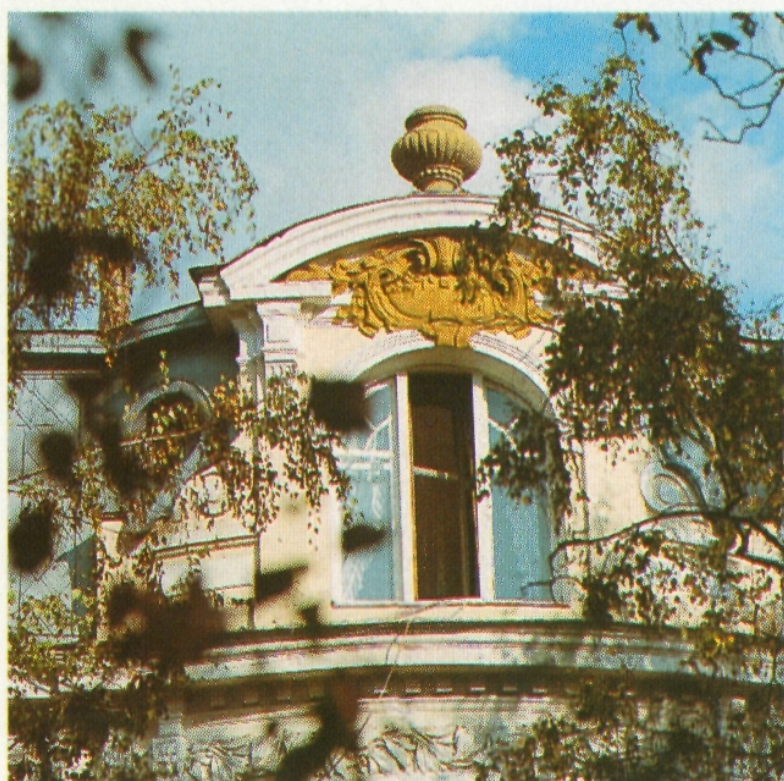




Sofia



Sofia is Bulgaria's fifth capital in succession. The previous four were Pliska, Preslav, Veliko Turnovo and Ohrid. This country seemed to have more capitals than any other. This illustrates Bulgaria's dramatic history for the country emerged as a sovereign state three times and about half of the 1300 years of history were of foreign domination. Sofia is one of the youngest capitals in Europe. It has been the capital city of Bulgaria for more than one hundred years but actually it lies on the layers of centuries. Constantine the Great, the founder of the Eastern Roman Empire, who called it "my





Rome" was hardly aware that the coeval of Troy and Mycenae was older than the Eternal City. Herodotus and Aristotle insist that it is the oldest city in Europe. Archaeological finds - objects and vessels - testify that the earliest inhabitants are to be dated to the 7th-8th millennium BC. The earliest written evidence is from 1st millennium BC.

If someone cares to count the names of the city, he will count at least twenty. The best known of these names are Serdica, Triaditsa, Sredets, and naturally, Sofia. Sofia's history as a city started with the Thracian Sardopolis. The 1st cen-





tury was the heyday of the city's efflorescence under Roman domination and under the emperor Ulpus Trajanus who provided the city with a government and with his name - Ulpia Serdica. The name can be read on coins from that time. The Roman chronicler Ammianus Marcellinus wrote that it was "a well appointed and attractive imperial residence" which stately entertained three emperors. To commemorate them, coins featuring the majesties were minted three times.

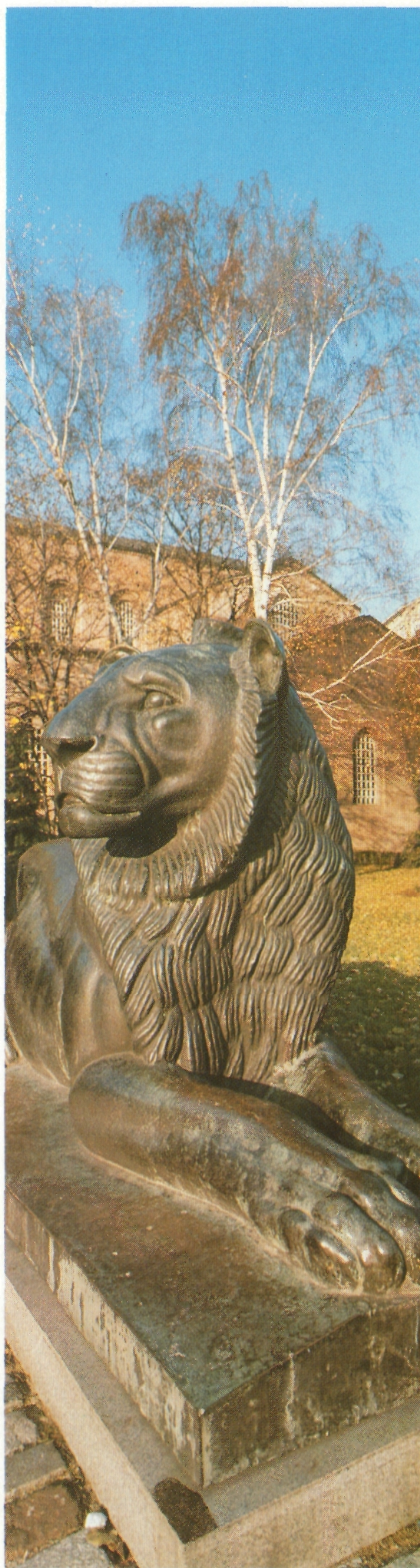
Fortified Serdica had the shape of a rectangle with a truncated northwestern angle. It was a queer fortress in a valley and so seemed easy to seize from any direction in default of rocks and deep rivers to be moats. The wall and the men were the only defense. The fortress was built in 176 as evident from a rectangular block with an inscription that was exposed in 1956. For over six centuries the fortress served the Western and Eastern Roman Empire and for almost another six after that, Bulgaria. Each time the city was a Byzantine possession it adopted the name Triaditsa which derived from the Greek phrase for Holy Trinity. In 809 the Bulgarian armies seized the city and its name Sredets of Slavonic origin reflected its central location. Historians argue when the city became Sofia but are unanimous that it owes its name to the Church of St Sophia which has been woven into the city's destinies for some 15 centuries now. Some travellers wrote that the church was erected for Constantine the Great's daughter who was buried in one of the niches. Others associate it with the sister of

Justinian who rebuilt the city that was razed by Attila's incursions. Still others believe that the church was dedicated to Divine Wisdom - "sophia" in Greek means wisdom.

The Church of St Sophia is among the most characteristic landmarks and one of the most distinguished monuments of architecture in the Balkan Peninsula. Elements of classical and pagan architecture have been employed to develop new forms which monumental medieval architecture absorbed. The style of St Sophia is the city's contribution to the history of European architecture. Elements of the ensemble appear later in quite a number of Romanesque structures.

Sofia is a green city with parks and gardens that largely alleviate the effect of the proximity of vast industrial areas. The drinking water coming from high mountains tastes better than the water in other European cities. The city planning is clear; city transport is easy to cope with. The names of most streets are unpronounceable for foreigners and given only in Cyrillic. St Alexander Nevsky Square occupying 22,000 square meters is the largest in Sofia. The Garibaldi Square near the Central Post Office is the smallest one. The Tzarigradsko Shosse (11.5 kilometers) and Bulgaria (8 kilometers) are the longest boulevards, and Stoyan Mihailovski (250 meters) is the shortest one. Tzar Simeon (3819 meters) is the longest street; Louis Leger (32 meters) is the shortest street, named after the first French Bulgarianist.

If you have one free hour in Sofia you will be offered to visit the St Alexan-





der Nevsky Church. The shining domes covered with 8 kg of gold dominate the skyline and the knell of bells can be heard from a distance of 30 kilometers. The church has a cruciform plan in a neo-Byzantine style. The huge mass whose dimensions did not mar the sense of proportion takes 3170 square meters; it is 735 meters long and 52 meters wide. The dome is 16 meters in diameter and is 42 meters high; the belfry is 52 meters high; the 12 bells were cast in Moscow and weigh 23 tons. The hollow of the biggest bell is 3 meters; its height is 12 tons.

The Church of St Alexander Nevsky owes its interior decoration to 13 Russian and 13 Bulgarian artists. It abounds in Sienna and Carrara marble; the



ciborium and the cross in the main altar are gilded; the icon screen, the bishop's throne and the king's throne whose columns are made from Brazilian onyx and alabaster are remarkable.

The crypt of the Church of St Alexander Nevsky displays printing and applied arts from the Bulgarian Middle Ages and Revival. The 170 exhibits are too many to explore them during a short visit. However, the two most valuable ones deserve mention: the 13th-14th century icon *The Miracle of Christ in Latom/Our Lady of Refuge with John the Theologian* from the Poganovo Monastery and *Our Lady of Tenderness/Christ Pantocrator* from Nessebur, both double-sided icons. A *Deesis* from the Bachkovo Monastery dating from 1495 is priceless.

The square is surrounded by the most imposing buildings in the capital city: the University, the National Library, the House of Parliament. Opposite is the Monument to the Liberators erected in 1907 following an international competition of sculptors from 30 countries of whom one was, strange as it may sound, from Turkey. The famous Florence-born Arnolfo Zocchi was the winner. The monument is 14 meters high and the statue of the Russian Tzar Alexander II on horseback is 4.5 meters high. It is considered one of Zocchi's masterpieces.

Tzar Osvoboditel, the prettiest boulevard in Sofia, will take you to Sveta Nedelya, the other main square, which has been the city center ever since. Tzar Osvoboditel was the first paved street in Sofia with yellow clinker pavement stones, imported



straight from Hungary. Many embassies, the Military Club, the City Garden, the lovely Russian Church are on the way. The National Natural History Museum is side by side with the Russian Church. It is believed to be the richest museum in the Balkans with collections of over 1 million exhibits representing 12,000 species.

A stylish square right after is named Alexander Battenberg after the first Bulgarian monarch after the Liberation. The First Grand National Assembly elected him to reign as a prince on April 17, 1879. Seven years later he abdicated to end up as a humble commander of an Austrian regiment and died in 1893. The former Royal Palace, a pretty building with rich rococo-style decorated walls, ceilings and stately entrance halls, houses today the National Art Gallery and the National Ethnography Museum. The gallery which was created in 1948 is the main center of research, selection, conservation and restoration of Bulgarian art. The collections acquire new items all the



time which already number 12,000. Most of the Ethnography Museum collections arranged in another building at that time perished in the air-raids in 1943. Today the museum shows and keeps over 100,000 exhibits which are the most valuable that traditional Bulgarian culture can present; costumes number 20,000. It is noteworthy that the houses of prayer of the three main religions in Bulgaria - Christianity, Islam and Judaism - peacefully coexist at a very short distance from one another around Sveta Nedelya Square. This is evidence of the deeply seated democratic attitudes and religious tolerance of the Bulgarian people.

That is why Bulgaria was the only country in nazi-occupied Europe where not even a single Jew was killed for being a Jew, a unique fact in new history. The Sofia Synagogue was built to the design by the great Viennese architect Grunanger and open for worship in 1909. He recreated the famous Sephardic house of prayer in Vienna which could not escape the bombing of World War II. It is one of the largest Sephardic synagogues in Europe, for a congregation of 1170; the central dome is lit by a 2 ton chandelier which is the biggest and heaviest in the Balkans.

The Banya Bashi Mosque near the Central Baths is a valuable monument of Islamic architecture. It is smaller than the Bouyuk Mosque which houses today the priceless Archaeological Museum collections on 1300 square meters, space which makes it the largest





monument that has survived from the time of Turkish rule. The Black Mosque owing its name to the black stone from which the crier's place was made is the most precious of all. It is not far from the center of the city; it was built in 1528 by Mimar Sinan, a great architect, a Bulgarian from Shiroka Luka who had been converted to Islam; he designed more than three hundred palaces, mosques, bridges and hospitals. Sinan died at the age of 99 and Sofia can be proud of having one of his works though very little of the original has survived. Today it is an orthodox church and bears the name Sveti Sedmochislenitsi for Sofia was liberated on the feast day of one of the Holy Seven, St Nahum.

The 4th century BC Church of St George just behind the Sheraton Hotel is the earliest and best preserved building in inner old Serdica. Its fresco frieze on the dome which is 30 meters in circumference depicts 22 prophets who are over 2 meters tall. The plasticity of depiction, the play-



ful rhythm and the unsurpassed expressiveness of this original gallery are unparalleled in medieval Bulgarian painting. The church is a rotunda built of baked red bricks; its singular planning, stylish outline and stern symmetry make it an integral part of downtown skyline. The ruins of a big Roman public building, remains of medieval Bulgarian houses and the first exposed Serdica street are nearby.

The Church of St Petka Samardjiska (of the Saddlers) is where Maria Louisa Boulevard starts. It is a picturesque building in a pedestrian subway buzzing with life: shops, coffee bars, street musicians and vendors of pictures and antiques. The church was built underground not only because the level of medieval structures is several meters below the level today. Simply the Bulgarian churches had to be low buildings as if on their bended knees before the minarets. They were the houses of prayer of a people who lived under such lawlessness that when Russian scholars prepared a list of the Slav nations for the empress Catherine the Great the Bulgarians were recorded as a vanished people and the Bulgarian language as a dead language.

The Courts of Justice are nearby St Nedelya, on the right side of Vitosha, the busiest shopping street in Sofia. Its space of 8400 square meters, 640 rooms and 25 spacious halls, a majestic colonnade, five huge vaulted doorways and the impressive lion-guarded stone staircase make it the most imposing Bulgarian building. The Courts of Justice are the most illustrious monument of prewar Bulgarian construction, a work of Bulgarian architects and built with Bulgarian materials. The Courts are the temporary house of the National Museum of History; part of the 110,000 archaeological and historical exhibits trace the history of the Bulgarian lands from





the Old Stone Age to the Liberation. The museum's visiting exhibitions have become permanent in the cultural life of many countries where they evoke amazement and admiration.

The Earth and Man National Museum is housed in a former depot built at the turn of the century and in the proximity of the imposing Palace of Culture. Most of the 20,000 exhibits are donations. The six expositions on 4000 square meters exhibition space comprise the world's largest collection of giant crystals (100 exhibits versus 53 in Paris). It is a real Aladin's cave for the arrested beauty of the morion druse which weighs 1.5 tons or the amethyst geode which weighs over 700 kilograms.

Sofia is a city which nature has endowed with a very favorable geographic location. Few European capital cities can boast the proximity of a high mountain. The city is at the foothills and the residential areas are slowly creeping uphill.

VITOSHA

is mentioned by all great scholars and travellers: Thucydides, Aristotle and Pliny. The names are different, the general meaning being "high steep" mountain. The huge pile of syenite has a characteristic cupola shape and is strikingly different from all other

mountains. Cherni Vruh (2290 meters) is the highest peak.

Vitosha is pretty in winter and summer alike. At an altitude of above 2000 meters the winter lasts five or six months and below 2000 meters, it ends a month earlier. July and August are the real summer months. The annual temperature range is lower than in the city. Very often there is sunshine in Vitosha while it is misty and cold in Sofia. The inversions in November-March and particularly in December and January are as many as thirty. The big "stone river" called Zlatni Mostove (Golden Bridges) is the most visited locality. But hikers care little about scientific disputes. They just gaze speechless at the arrested piece of cosmic magnificence. Or else they take pictures.

The Boyana Church which is just 9 kilometers from the city center is the pearl of Vitosha. The three parts of the church date from different periods. The eastern part which is the earliest is a small cross-of-dome building from the 10th-11th century. The central building dates from the 13th century and was intended to be a family sepulcher for sebastocrator Kaloyan, the governor of Sredets district who chose Boyana for his citadel. The latest part was built in 1880; it has no particular artistic merit.

The frescoes in the church are from three periods: the 11th, 13th and 14th-15th century. The most remarkable frescoes are dated to 1259; the 89 scenes depict 240 figures in groups or individually. These scenes testify what Bulgarian life was and how advanced it was. Those amazing frescoes anticipate Giotto. The portraits of king Konstantin Assen and queen Irina and the donors' portraits of Kaloyan and Dessislava, the earliest realistic paintings in medieval Europe, are very powerful.

Depicting scenes and figures according to the strict canon the anonymous genius has animated the narrow space with lives and experiences in terms of playful expressions and motions. Each of the Boyana scenes depicts a different Christ. The gospel characters are of flesh and blood. And to dispel any doubt, the disciples of Jesus in "The Last Supper" are eating onion and turnip.





The road to Kyustendil via Pernik is national motorway 6, with some road signs E-871. The scenery is lovely; travelling is easy and one of the seven wonders in Bulgaria, the Zemen Gorge, is on the way. Train ride is most impressive as the railway plunges into nine tunnels and goes via seven picturesque bridges across the river Strouma. The gorge is a 22 kilometer long fairy tale with an entrance at the town of Zemen and exit at the village of Ruzhdavitsa. Nature had outdone itself as a sculptor. Each river meander seems to uncover a world on its own with spectacular needles, steep rocks and majestic stone groups like the



Gulubino Rocks or the Sarai which looks like a miraculous palace. In the opinion of quite a number of travellers the Polskokavishki waterfall whose height is over 50 meters is the most scenic nook in the Balkans.

The famous Zemen Monastery is not far from the town of Zemen. Its cruciform Church of St John the Divine very much resembles the Boyana Church and may be dated to the 11th-12th century on the basis of its plan. Externally the church resembles a cube with a square form and the height is approximately equal to the width; the dome with a tambour lies on a high rotund drum and rests on four arches that are decorated with eight flat niches. Three layers of frescoes have been exposed in the church; most of them are in a good state of preservation; the interior wall painting was done in the



third quarter of the 14th century. The donors' portraits on the southern wall are most interesting in defiance of all medieval scholasticism canons and with lovely realistic down-to-earth human images instead of emaciated and pale mystic faces. That impressive forerunner of the Renaissance shows again the advanced stage of a cultural evolution that was on a par with the European one and discontinued by the Ottoman domination.

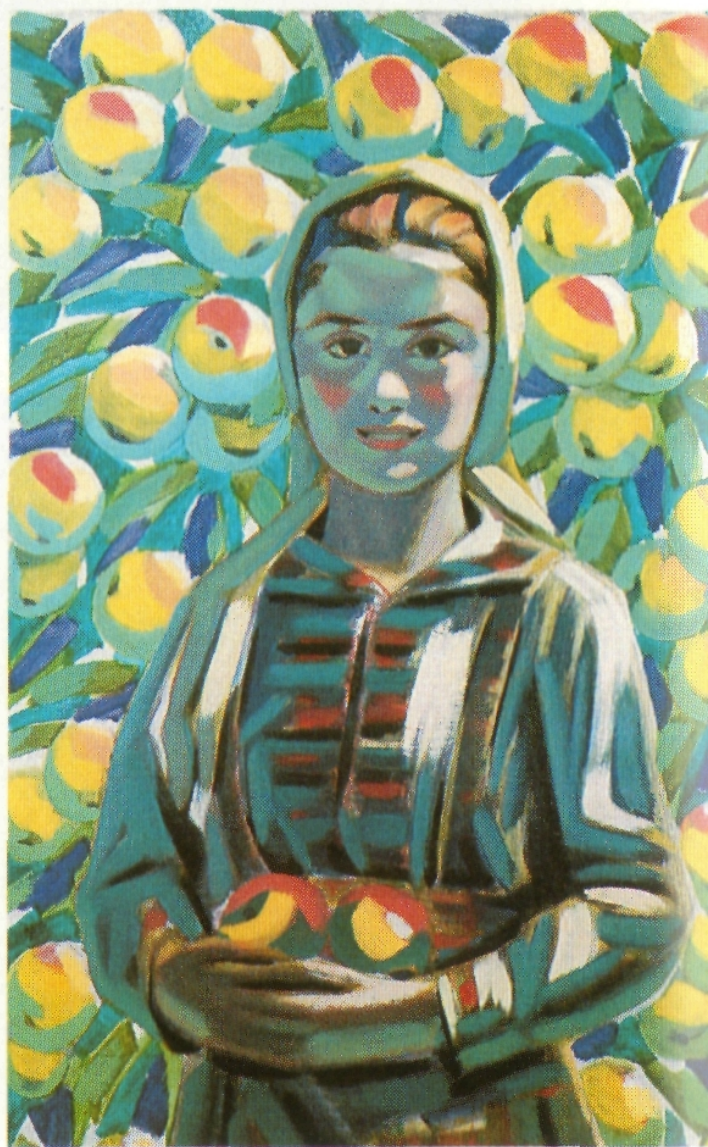
For many centuries the Kyustendil valley has been Bulgaria's orchard. In the year of Liberation Kyustendil region had 1300 hectares of orchards, the most extensive fruit-growing area in Bulgaria, and 90 per cent of the plums were distilled into *rakiya*. In 1911 the orchards covered 2200 hectares of which 2000 hectares were plum trees that amounted to 40 per cent of all orchards in the



country. Apple orchards covered just 50 hectares. However, fresh fruit export that started in 1925 changed the ratio in favor of apple growing. In 1930 Kyustendil produced 85 per cent of the total export; there were 120 apple and 46 pear varieties. The latter are still used to distill the famous William rakiya. Today Kyustendil region produces one third of the cherries and 25 per cent of the apples in Bulgaria, the latter being the most common fruit grown in Bulgaria with annual production of at least 400,000 tons.

That field was a real paradise for artists like Kiril Tsonev who after successful exhibitions in Munich, Amsterdam, Copenhagen, San Francisco was invited to Mexico by Siqueiros himself to join the decoration effort of the Mexican Houses of Parliament. The serene fresh bright sun of Kyustendil seems to enchant artists. The greatest Bulgarian artist Vladimir Dimitrov, the Master, chose his light there. Unlike El Greco who wandered all Mediterranean lands to find the sun of Toledo or the crazy Flemish van Gogh who went all over France to find the molten gold of Arles, the Master was a native.

He was born in 1882 in the village of Frolosh. His first exhibition was displayed in 1903 in Kyustendil. At that time he was a clerk in the mayor's





office. With a bag only he walked all the way to the capital city to graduate from the Painting School. From 1924 to 1928 he was commissioned by the American diplomat John Crane and most of the 300 or so pictures that he painted for him are now in America. For over 25 years the Master lived and worked in the village of Shishkovtsi among ordinary people and in surroundings which he approached always as a pilgrim visits holy places. That inventive and inquisitive artist who said that only a brick maker can't claim to be a master as he uses molds, has left Bulgaria

romantic, expressive and strange pictures, a substantial part of which can be seen in the town art gallery that was opened in 1959. Kyustendil is believed to be one of the sunniest places in Bulgaria. That quiet, warm and amiable town that in the spring and autumn is flooded with fragrances that nature generously has endowed, with lime trees, rose bushes and flower beds, with the tender song of nightingales, has a sparing and salubrious climate which is one of its major assets. It is at an altitude of 525 meters and with Hissarluka hill over and in the town as a real lung. It is one of the ridges of the





Ossogovo Mountains, a source of evening cool, bracing air and romantic spell, with a park designed in 1890. For millennia the hill has been associated with the town's history. It features on a coin from the reign of emperor Caracalla (198-217) when a big temple crowned its top.

The mean annual temperature is 10.8°C ; the annual range is 22°C . There are thirty days only with temperature below the zero and snow which is as thin as 40 centimeters at the most stays for thirty days. February temperature is always above

the zero. The forsythia blossoms in late February. The last spring frost is on the early days of April. Autumn is long, warm and sunny and lasts till late November. Precipitation is moderate, 608 centimeters per annum, which is below the figure for the country; distribution is relatively even; summer is blessed to receive more rain than autumn. There is not much cloud; there are some twenty days of mist and 2200 hours of sunshine; the wind is gentle.

The hot mineral springs are Kyustendil's biggest asset. As a matter of fact it is perhaps the first Bulgarian resort that has existed for over 2000 years. A total of forty springs discharge over 2.5 million liters within 24 hours in a vast hydrothermal area in the southern part of the town, for many years the horn of plenty in this country. The water temperature is between 45 and 73°C and special cooling pools reduce the temperature to prevent mixing the water with water free of mineral substances which will deprive it of its curing powers.

The water is clear and colorless; its physical and chemical properties

are similar to those of the French springs in the Pyrenees. The mineral content is low - 0.678-0.719 g/l; the pH is 8.9-9.15 which is a low alkaline reaction; the water hardness is low; it is pleasant to drink despite the smell of hydrogen sulfide due to the 0.2048 g/l which is the highest sulfur concentration in all Bulgarian waters. That water cures best pain in the joints, diseases of the peripheral nervous system - plexitis, neuritis, radiculitis, lumbago and discal hernia. The spa is popular for women's diseases - chronic inflammations and sterility resulting from them. Kyustendil has everything. It is close to the international airport in Sofia (just 82 kilometers), and has convenient road and rail connections. There is a summer sunbathing area with mineral water pools, a nice and big woodland park for rest and entertainment, kinesitherapy sites, playgrounds and remedial gymnastics facilities. In addition there are many public baths of long-standing tradition, a modern cure center with mud and paraffin treatment, physical and hydrotherapy, inhalation and irrigation treatment, sanatoria, recreation homes, good hotels, boarding houses and private lodgings.

Kyustendil has been in existence for 25 centuries now. The earliest archaeological finds date from the New Stone Age. The Thracian presence (the Danteleti) can be traced back to the Late Bronze Age. In one of the 37 books of his Natural History Pliny the Elder wrote that the water





chestnut leaves were the feed of their mighty horses and that the bread made from the nuts was quite delicious and strengthened the bowels.

The town's earliest name was Pautalia , the City of the Spring. It was recorded in an inscription of a basilica from 135 that was built in honor of emperor Hadrian; in Ptolemy's Geography (2nd century). However, after the barbarian incursions in late 6th century that name disappeared from the scene of history.

It seems that emperor Marcus Ulpius Trajanus (97-117), a military genius, a politician of vision and an excellent administrator was cured by the healing effect of the local water. Therefore he granted urban status to Pautalia which acquired his dynastic name. The city became one of the largest administrative centers in Thrace with a city council, a senate, a popular assembly, its own magistrates and four archons who were the supreme rulers. It was one of the few cities with teachers in rhetoric and philosophy.

The Asclepion, a temple complex on 3600 square meters, was the second largest in the ancient world but for the temples in Epidaurus and Argolis. In addition to size the prestigious site required a healthy and scenic locality, mountain drinking water, bracing air and public utilities, in general something like a five-star class. Walls 1.8 meters thick with marble facing and hypocaust heating have survived. The city fortress wall was built under Marcus Aurelius who wrote some of his best works in that rich and famous spa. The fortress sprawling on 24 hectares was an irregular polygon with gridiron planning (Hippo-

damus' pattern); the streets are the broadest ever exposed in Bulgaria. The city was compactly built-up around the bath and the city gates. Under Aurelianus (270-275) Pautalia was the third largest city in Dacia Interior but for Serdica and Naisus (today's Nis). Pautalia flourished again under Justinian the Great who is said to have been born in Tavalichevo, a village in Kyustendil area, and who was one of the most enlightened rulers in the Eastern Empire. In 457-459 emperor Zeno offered the city to Theodoric, the chieftain of the Goths, to make it his capital and stop incursions in return.

The Roman period has left plenty of evidence that is in the core of the rich local museum, originally a small collection created in 1897 in the teacher training school. The coin collection is very varied and traces the city's unwritten history. A coin of Julia Domna features the river god Strymon as a reclining figure leaning against an urn, from which so much water spouts; other coins depict boats as evidently in those days the river was navigable. Emperor Antonius Pius (138-161) allowed the city to mint its own coins and thus recognized its political and administrative role and its sovereignty.

The city's new name Velbuzhd was probably eponymous and deriving from the name of a local Slav ruler. The dating of its incorporation in Bulgaria is not very clear but in the context of historical events, the reign of khan Kardam (777-809) when the Bulgarians advanced far into the Strouma region is the probable time. Velbuzhd is one of the bishop sees subordinated to the Bulgarian patriarch and listed in the apse of the Prespa basilica.



Also it is mentioned in the charter of Basil Bulgaroctonus of 1019; a manuscript of a Velbuzhd bishop of 1072 is kept in Paris. The local bishop was number three on the lists from the time of Alexius I Comnenus; a trade agreement between Byzantium and Venice of 1198 mentions Velbuzhd and Triaditsa at the most important cities. In 1204 Velbuzhd was liberated by the Bulgarian king Kaloyan; king Ivan Assen's Dubrovnik charter of 1230 also mentioned Velbuzhd. The city gained its place in history owing to the Velbuzhd battle on June 28, 1330. The war was fought for the sake of a woman, for the reinstatement of queen Anna, the sister of the Serbian king Stefan

Uros III Dechan. John Cantacuzenus, the life of King Stefan and Nicephoras Gregoras give a detailed description of this battle in which 30,000 men, a huge number in those days, fought. The Bulgarians were commanded by Mihail Shishman who deservedly is considered the most outstanding ruler in the 14th century that was so unfortunate for the Bulgarians. The Serbs were commanded by the son of Uros, the future great king Stefan Dusan.

The end of the day brought defeat to the Bulgarians who were treacherously deceived with peace talks. A squad of armor-clad Catalan mercenaries did the massacre and did not spare the king either. As it often happened in those days Stefan Dusan whose mother was Bulgarian married Elena, the sister of the next Bulgarian king Ivan Alexander on the



Easter of 1332. Something more about Ivan Alexander. He was one of Bulgaria's greatest kings, possessed with the idea to make Turnovo the Third Rome. The most admirable Old Bulgarian manuscripts - the Vatican copy of Manasses' Chronicle, the London Tetraevangelia and the Tomich Psalter - were produced in the time of his reign. From the 14th century onwards religious writings in the main mention the town by another name: Kolasia (Kolousha); the names of 13 Kolasia bishops have come down to us. The surviving 12-14th century Church of St George with a cross of dome plan measures 10 x 8.7 meters and has picturesque brick masonry and tile decoration. The wall paintings dating from the same period have high artistic value, being the first medieval pictures in Bulgaria in



fresco technique. Pyrgo's tower which is 15 meters tall and measures 8.25 x 8.34 meters dates from the 14th century too.

The town's present name derived from Konstantin, the last ruler of the town before the Turkish invasion. Named Konstantinova Banya (Konstantinov's Bath) after him, the Turks corrupted it to Kyustendil. The ruler of Velbuzhd was son-in-law of Ivan Alexander, a vassal to Murad. The Turkish chronicler Neshri wrote that "honey and butter flowed like a river" at the welcoming ceremony for the sultan. He fought with Murad against the Serbs on Kossovo Pole and against the Wallachians at Crajova. He fought against Murad too. This is how





it was in those days. Kyustendil was seized by Turhan Pasha in 1427 and became one of the richest sanjaks in Roumelia. The holdings and spahi possessions placed it third after Sofia and Erzerum. Unlike the other sanjak beys that of Kyustendil had a standard with two, not one, horse tails; it was only the sanjak bey of Sofia who had a standard with three tails. The surviving mosques are Fetih Mehmed of 1531 and Ahmed Bey of 1575. There was a great number of tekkes, the biggest of which acquired a hair from the beard of the Prophet in 1868. Kadi Bridge in Nevestino, a village nearby, is the earliest Turkish structure in that region. It was built in 1470; it is 150 feet long, 8 feet wide and rests on five semicircular vaults. And as the turbulent river all the time destroyed what was built, the builders, the story goes, had to immure the wife who was the first to bring a meal. Another less cruel story tells that the builders measured the shadow and immured it in the bridge. However, the young woman died as soon as she was back home.

In early 19th century the Bulgarian homes were as few as 21; in 1865 they numbered 340; on the eve of the Liberation, 1520. Virgin Mary whose construction started in 1816 was rebuilt after the Turks pulled it down. The second time it was built during the night. The builders covered the nail heads with leather before they struck them down with the hammer to drive them in. The one-apse three-nave pseudo basilica measures 23.6 x 14.4 meters outside and has a graceful architectural volume and clear-cut forms. It has two sections and two altars; there was service in the upper section on the feast of St Nicholas only. The old school (from 1849) in the churchyard is now a baptistery. A girls school was opened in 1860 in a private house. The reading club was set up on July 1, 1869; from 1879 onwards it was called Tsvyat (Flower). The monastery of St Mina, the first charity Christian institution, was built at that time. The New Church whose grace is rare was consecrated quite late, in 1934.

After the Liberation the population of Kyustendil which was the nearest town to Macedonia that was not free yet quickly increased. In 1910 there 10,573 Bulgarians, 1800 Jews and 1200 Gypsies; in 1956, 25,025; in 1985, 54,111. A school of fruit-growing and viticulture was opened in 1897; the highschool which was to become a teacher-training college was built in 1894 after a design by Grunanger; during the World War the building was converted headquarters of the Bulgarian army; later it was redesigned to accommodate Bulgaria's first courts of law. The clock bell of the building came from the old town clock with one of the earliest bell inscriptions for the Southern Slavs. It continues to strike the hours as glorious as ever of this national spa that publishes even an encyclopedia of its own, with tradition in food, knitwear and footwear industry, a leader in yarns and condensers production, a cozy home of intelligent, good-natured and very hospitable people.



This itinerary will take you to the Rila Mountains which seem to be a piece of the Alps thrown into the heart of the Balkans. Rila is the fourth giant mountain in Europe rising like a mighty fort in the center of the peninsula. The average altitude is 1487 meters. It covers an area of 2400 square kilometers. Its 130 peaks which exceed 2000 meters have strange and poetic names like Deno (Day) which owes its name to the fact that its face is the first to be touched by the daylight. The highest peak is Moussala (2925 meters). The monitoring station that was established there in 1932 is the highest altitude station in the Balkans.

The eminent explorer Ami Boue first visited it in 1836 in the company of celebrated scientists - geologists, botanists and entomologists. That was the first scientific expedition in Bulgaria. The Bulgarian king Ferdinand climbed Moussala first in 1889. And as the king was a natural scientist of European reputation, he liked the mountain which was a real natural history museum where butterflies alone swarming



over pastures that can feed 150,000 cows are numbered in hundreds of species. Most of Rila became royal possession. Several hunting chalets were built for the king like Sitnyakovo and Sarugyol.

Rila looks like a fortress rising to the clouds, with stubborn upright bastions, crests and pyramidal towers, besieged above all by other mountains. With a body that seems to support the firmament, Rila is beautiful like a dream, with romantic valleys that are open and smiling or morose and formidable; it is a severe and tender, wild and pretty mountain. Cone-shaped craters and abysses send forth cool and eternity; inaccessible enchanting pinnacles contrast with the magic of gentle winds and rapid springs. The silence will let you feel the breath and song of the majestic forest. That living giant wall formed by thousands of graceful upright fir trees is so compact and marvelously regular that looks like the longtime working of a



meticulous gardener; the slim trees are so huge that even the steel single-pylon supports of the lifts look like a flimsy toy construction. For Thucydides whom Pericles sent into exile Rila was “a big and uninhabited mountain”. Ovid discovered it during his banishment in Constantza in late 1st century. For him it was “the Ice Mountain that nourished the young Hebrus”. The earliest name of the mountain, Dounaks, meaning a place abounding in water, was given by the Thracians. Titus Livius (59 BC-17 AD) gives the same name in his description of the campaign of the Bastarni in Thrace. It is the name that the geographer Strabo quotes. The origin of the next name Roula (Rula) that the Slavs corrupted to Rila, the Water Mountain, for the 25 rivers that spring from the bowels of the mountain, is similar. Lakes are Rila’s most precious water asset; without its dove-colored

eyes the mountain would have been sadder. Lake Moussalensko which holds ice throughout the year is at the highest altitude of all the lakes whose number exceeds 150; lake Smradlivoto which measures 900 x 250 meters is the largest and deep (down to 24 meters). The trout weigh up to 5 kg. And there is at least one legend of each lake. Here is one about lake Roupalishko. Sheep were washed in that lake before shearing. The shepherds would always leave a gift to the half-fish that was the lord of the lake water. A proud shepherd Mancho had trust more in his stove that hit many beasts and his pipe that enchanted his sheep which obeyed it as if it was a bugle and did not leave a penny. It is easy to guess what followed; first he lost his herd and then he died a violent death. A lovely peak that the lake mirrors was named after Mancho as if to let his soul see his own failure.

Most of the lakes are cirques and glacial; often they form groups and are situated on terraces. The Seven Lakes that form an amphitheater are the prettiest lake group. The vertical drop is almost 500 meters. Here they are in a descending succession: Sulzata (the Tear); Dulbokoto (Deep) as it is 37.5 meters deep; Bubreka (the Kidney) owes its name to its shape and is the most translucent lake where visibility is 18 meters. The fourth lake becomes two lakes in summer, hence its name Bliznakat (the Twin). The fifth lake Triprustnikut (Three Fingers) owes its name to the shape again. The largest chalet in Rila is by the sixth lake. Understandably the seventh lake will be called Dolnoto (Lower). The Maritsa Lakes are very pretty. The story goes that the magic songs of Orpheus himself drew the crystal-clear lake water to the surface.

Samokov is a town that was non-existent in Roman times. The earliest records date from 1508 when the sultan Bayazid II made his





grand vizier owner of the Rila Mountains under the name Djebeli Rila which after his death was made a waqf of Mecca and Medina. “Djebel” is an Arabic word meaning “mountain”. This is why the high quality mountain tobacco variety grown in Bulgaria is called Djebel. Samokov always had a Bulgarian name. Everybody wanted to have its metal but no one dared lay hands on its spirit. Metal extraction was a millennial trade. The Samokov iron was used to make arms, anchors and studs for three continents. The ore was obtained from syenite sand which was washed in wooden grooves, then dried and melted in furnaces (vidni) which were heated by charcoal. The pieces of finished iron were treated with huge hammers (samokov) which weighed over half a ton and were set in motion by water. There were over one hundred iron foundries in Samokov district and the last foundry operated in the village of Radouil till 1908.

The available women’s labor force and the raw materials and plenty of water promoted crafts like braid making at some 300 mills. Women enjoyed a high social status. Felix Kanitz was right when he noticed this fact as unusual among the southern Slavs, the more so with the oriental practices around. Some 2000 women, spinners and weavers, earned as much as their husbands and sometimes paid their debts and taxes. To quote Konstantin Fotinov (1790-1858), a native of Samokov and an eminent Revival period educator who published the first Bulgarian periodical “Lyuboslovie”: “The woman is the first and the last factor in our prosperity.” Economic prosperity led to a genuine cultural renaissance. Together with Koprivshtitsa Samokov claims the oldest Bulgarian municipal school. In 1828 local people imported a printing press, the first one in Bulgaria, to print books and engravings.



Since times immemorial life runs where water runs. It is a holy place which gives boon and invites meditation: the White Fountain with the Earring downtown is the proof. The builder who created this miniature temple of eternal flux had fertile imagination. He chiseled an earring on one of the walls of the monolith block and thus decorated the fountain like a young bride. Next to it he put stone, dark with age and grooved for the rippling water to quench the thirst of the birds.

The broad eaves and the alternation of windows and doors account for the unique outer appearance of the Samokov houses. The interior distribution followed the seasons of the year and the owner's craft. The rooms were small but functional. Anything that was not needed at the moment was put in cupboards



built into the walls. Ovens were lit from outside. Every home had water supply and a bathroom. The Usurer's House, a real palace of 20 or so rooms and floor space 500 square meters, is perhaps one of the best three Revival period Bulgarian houses. The ceiling of the spacious sitting room is made from carved wood, with murals, windows enframed in wood, finely placed plinths, flights of stairs and balustrades. The synagogue next to it was built in 1859 and its lovely southern facade is one of the last good examples of Bulgarian baroque.

Samokov was a big religious center. Its diocese covered Thrace as



far as the Thracian Sea. The Grannies convent is a very unusual example of monastic canons. There are no long balconies, communal kitchens and refectories. Each nun had a "bungalow" of her own which was different from the other. At first sight this appears rambling but the architectural impact is powerful.

The Metropolitan Church is the most visited sight. The foundation stone was laid in 1790 and the finishing touches were put in 1805. It is a three-nave basilica of the architectural pattern that disappeared from Bulgaria some eight centuries ago. The return was simply a renaissance first in Melnik, in the Church of St Nicholas that was built in 1756, and next in Samokov. The walls are bare, devoid of frescoes, as if to reinforce the impact of the magnificent icon screen. Horse-drawn carts brought the walnut wood from Mount Athos.

An Athonite master Antony by name made the middle part of the icon screen. His baroque balanced and exquisite art was coupled with some rococo ideas. The Samokov wood carving school was established later as the famous local icon painters were not carvers. The founding father Atanas Teladour who in 1830 made the two side wings instilled half of his soul and restless and bold creative endeavor into the magnificent tracery. The other half was saved for the Main Church of the Rila Monastery.



The icons are a masterpiece of the progenitor of the Zograf family of artists. It was there that he made the audacious departure from the religious art of mysticism. His Virgin Mary and Jesus smile and do not threaten with consequences; they enjoy life under clouds that are painted like bright balls of steam that the maw of an engine seems to belch forth. That magnificence will leave you with parched lips but this is what the clear water of the fountain nestled in a kiosk in the church yard is there for. The fountain was built by the men of the wine makers guild (the microclimate in Samokov would set right even the wrong wine so they brought wine here from different regions of the country). Even Baccus yielded to the good spirits of the tears of the earth.

Strange as it may sound, Bayrakli Mosque, a Turkish house of prayer,



is the top achievement of Bulgarian Revival period architecture. The building consists of two cubes of which one is inside the other and the architectural-spatial core is 7 meters long. Seven is a biblical and folkloric number, that is universal and omnipresent. In this case it is associated with a legend about the last Bulgarian king Ivan Shishman (? - 1395) who died near Samokov. Legend has it that the Turks cut off his head. The majesty's head hit seven places in the valley and the seven springs which spouted forth are still called the royal springs.

The baroque-style Bayrakli Mosque was built in 1840. The vaults are made from naturally crooked pine and oak wood. It is a blend of an Orthodox church and a Samokov mansion. The Bulgarian masters Ioan, Risto and Kosto who signed their work painted flowers and ornaments on the walls instead of holy texts, contrary to the canons of the Koran. But their work made the Moslems admire the beauty created by a Christian in a house of prayer with a minaret.

In the days of Thucydides Rila might have been uninhabited. Today it is easy to reach it from all villages at the foothills owing to roads with a total length of 270 kilometers. Many mountain roads branch off and take visitors to a real paradise of pine, fir and white fir trees, where mist is a rare phenomenon and the ultraviolet rays are very intense. The Moussala part of the Rila alone provides space for 25,000 skiers at once, hence its development as a second Tyrol.

From Samokov you may go to Borovets though very few hesitate and



make for Malyovitsa, the favorite of photographers, artists and hikers. Malyovitsa is the symbol and cradle of Bulgarian mountaineering and is praised in the songs of harsh and brave mountaineers. Govedartsı (altitude 1160 meters) is a village sprawling in the valley of the river Cherni Iskur and is the point of departure to this unearthly and mysterious paradise. This part of the mountain called the Rila stone necklace makes up just 4 per cent but is amazingly scenic. It is a strong backbone whose vertebrae are dozens of high peaks plus several dozens of ribs which are most prominent in the north-northwest direction. This is the most indented part of the moun-



tain, a real maze of precipitous rock faces, sharp angles and steep grooves. Some of the peaks are Dvougıav (Two Heads, 2605 meters) and Zliya Zub (the Evil Fang, 2678 meters) which is an ancient sentry with arched brows and the natural knot of the whole lace of chaotically tossed pinnacles; the precipitous walls of the Dyavolski Igli (Devil's Needles) descend like a huge stone garland.

Malyovitsa is not among Rila's top ten mounts but is the highest one in northwest Rila. The pyramid rises almost vertical 2729 meters over a cirque where nine lakes are nestled and is a majestic picture of headlong precipices, clear water bodies and snow-clad or stone-faced peaks. The 300 meter vertical Alpine face to the northeast is most majestic. It is easy to understand why this gray-black granite

triangle is the root and symbol of mountaineering in Bulgaria. The central mountaineering school was opened in 1952 when a small hotel was built. The precipitous faces of the Zliya Zub (the Evil Fang), Iglata (the Needle) and Portala (the Gate), Dyavolski Igli (the Devil's Needles) and Dvouglov (Two Heads) lend Alpine authenticity to the landscape. Over 150 mountaineer routes from category two to six have been traced there. The longest wall for scaling is the southern wall of Mount Dvouglov (460 meters); the eastern walls of Dyavolski Igli are the most difficult scaling routes in Bulgaria.

Hikers approach Malyovitsa chalet southwards in the valley of the



river Malyovishka. It takes about an hour to reach it and then skiing down the gentle slopes is a thrilling experience. Expert skiers can use runs that are more than 5000 meters long; the five rope tows can take up to 2000 persons per hour. Caution! "Wild" hikers should read the following line. Avalanche grounds are well explored and signs have been put up but caution is necessary nonetheless. Such grounds constitute at least 35% of the total territory of the Malyovitsa part. There are about 130 avalanches in this area every year. Borovets is the "forecourt" of the mountain. Its 90-year long history makes it the veteran and the leader of the Bulgarian mountain resorts. It is sheltered from mountain winds and storms in a fold at the foot of Mount Moussala. This part of the massif is prominently



Alpine looking with pinnacles, cirques with 12 crystal-clear lakes, deeply cut valleys and attractive moraines.

Borovets is a convenient starting point for hiking to the high parts of the mountain. There are several mounts which exceed 2500 meters, many well known hiking facilities and 16 altitude bases. Four localities in the proximity of the resort afford breathtaking views: Shoumnatitsa (3 kilometers away from the center), Chernata Skala (5 kilometers), So-kolets (7 kilometers) and the Sitnya-kovo Palace (5 kilometers). It is to the advantage of Borovets that it is near to the Sofia international airport, to E-80 motorway (just 20 kilometers off where the road branches to Kostenets), and E-79 motorway.

There are eight hotels in Borovets. The Rila Hotel, the biggest one in the Balkans, has 2000 beds, 300 studios with kitchenettes, shops, sports facilities and entertainment. The Samokov Hotel which outshines the former is just 50 meters from the Yastrebets gondola lift lower station





with the best ski runs around. The Yastrebets Hotel next to the Yastrebets III run is very attractive. A Finnish settlement is a nice-looking ensemble from red fir wood on an area of 1.5 hectares.

Originally Borovets was a summer resort but in the past decades it became a center which is well known among the world's skiing celebrities. The snow does not melt for 150 days a year; its lifts can carry almost 10,000 persons per hour. The four-seat lift to Martinovi Baraki is 1310 meters long. The gondola lift to Yastrebets is 4827 meters long. During the 25 minute ride you will enjoy the view. The lift to Sitnyakova Skala is 1860 meters long and can carry 400 persons per hour.

The total length of the Borovets ski runs is more than 40 kilometers. Markoudjitsite locality is a real winter ski stadium. The five cableways have a lifting capacity of 1000 persons per hour each, the ski runs are connected and skiers can move from one rope tow to another. The altitude is 2200-2500 meters; snow does not melt before April and you can go there for skiing even in late spring.





Rila Monastery





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Believe it or not, nobody will believe you if you tell him that you've visited Sofia and didn't visit the Rila Monastery. The Rila Monastery was founded in the first half of the 10th century, just three centuries after the foundation of the Bulgarian state. The distance of 120 kilometers from Sofia and the altitude of 1147 meters won't be too much for a car. Take the road to Pernik and then E-79 international motorway to Greece heading to Kou-lata cross-border check-point. The road fork is 21 kilometers from Doupnitsa. The road parallels the winding river Rilska. Drive slow not because it is dangerous but to enjoy the really enthralling scenery along a fairly good mountain road.

The saint Ivan Rilski (John of Rila) lived in late 9th and early 10th century. He died on August 18, 946. The son of humble parents was a shepherd before he became a monk. Since his relatives tried to bring him back to worldly life, Ivan simply escaped to the Great Rila Wilderness which he left just once to return a walking stick to his monastery from where he had taken it.

Hermitage was common practice in those days and sort of protest against the lay ways. He preached that you can be a good Christian even if you don't go to the churches. It is enough to pray to God and to do good. He was a Christian missionary; a lot of people flocked to hear his wise advice and tried to live the life that he lived. Even king Peter (927-970), the second son of Simeon the Great, remembered for the long truce with Byzantium that was signed under his reign and wedding solemnities with the grand-daughter of the emperor Romanus Lacapenus - the first breakthrough in the Byzantine

doctrine which prohibited to marry princesses to barbarian rulers - visited the saint.

The saint of Rila was famous as a righteous man and a healer. Evidence is provided by written and oral tradition in which sometimes it is difficult to draw the line between legend and reality, fiction and truth. His Covenant which has come down to us in later transcripts - eight by Bulgarian and two by Byzantine authors - is a reliable record. The great Bulgarian enlightener and last patriarch Euthymius of Turnovo (c.1327-c.1401), exiled by the Turks to die at the Bachkovo Monastery wrote the most extensive of all lives dedicated to Ivan Rilski. Ivan Rilski is a common figure in Bulgarian icon painting after the 13th century; the lives of the saint popularized him in Bulgaria and also in Serbia, Romania, Greece and Russia. His name is quoted together with the all-Slav saints Cyril and Methodius. It takes 40 minutes to walk east of the monastery to the old skete, the





Hermitage, on the northern slope of the Rila Mountains. As the life tells, Ivan Rilski lived here and was buried here. The cells in which the first monks lived are next to the small church. A narrow crevice leads to a site over the cave and the church. It is believed that only righteous men and women can squeeze through. As Ivan Rilski felt that death was near he dug his own grave and put in it herbs that were known to him only. That is why his body did not turn to dust but to ashes.

In 1448 Ioasaf, David and Theophan, sons of the bishop of Kroupnik Jacob, re-established the monastery that fell in decline after the Turkish invasion. Because it was out of the way of Turkish main roads it preser-



ved a privileged autonomy, had branches in many towns and kept in touch with virtually all towns and villages in Bulgaria. In mid-19th century the branches numbered 50 and half of the monks served there.

It was a rule that everyone living in the monastery had to be literate. Two schools looked to that. The one was elementary and the other for qualification. This may be the reason why the monastery library is one of the richest in Bulgaria with its 32,000 volumes of which 9000 are old Slavonic and Bulgarian manuscripts. The 250 manuscripts that were produced in the monastery are the most valuable holdings.

The monastery museum is very rich and in perfect order. Every exhibit is





worth seeing. May we draw your attention to three exhibits only. First, the chrysobull (charter) of king Ivan Shishman; it is evident from it that the monastery existed in the 13th century. Chrysobull means a letter with a gold seal, written in the imperial chancellery (if that is how it was called) and signed by the king himself in cinnabar. The priceless document is kept in a special ark. The old door from carved wood has been preserved from the old church. The main element is an interlacing “endless” cord-shaped ornament in addition to flat depiction of lions and gryphons reminiscent of the title pages of ancient books. Though the two-wing door is imposingly large, it appears very fragile.

The unique cross from carved wood made by the monk Rafail is the exhibit with the greatest force of attraction. Some scholars of East Christian art refer to cross making as “monastery needlework”. Rafail’s work could be said to be a Christian feat for after 12 years of work, from 1790 to 1802, the man went blind.



The monk chose a blossoming cross, the geometric version of the tree of life, the universal symbol of the Ascension of Jesus Christ. That canonical object measures 80 x 40 cm together with the stand and 36 scenes and about 200 figures - apostles, martyrs, kings and ordinary people regardless of rank or position - carved on either side. Rafail's artistic hand carved several stories on every inch of space; the scenes from the Bible are flesh and blood. Every motif and every relief give quiet joy and reveal the eternity of art.

The monastery kitchen is the best preserved of the estate buildings. You could cook food for 4000 people at a time. You will see there the fireplace and the huge cauldrons, one of which was big enough to cook an ox in it, and the vaulted ceiling that was also a chimney and looks like a fish with the scales inside. This kitchen is unique in the Balkans; that work of architecture is remarkable for its size but not only it; the pyramidal alternation of arches and pendentives that vary in size enabled the self-taught builder to achieve a steady height of 22 meters. The engineer Eiffel applied the same static principle to his iron tower in Paris sixty-seven years later.

The Rila Monastery which is the largest in the Balkans is a most imposing architectural monument of the Bulgarian Revival. Only Hrel'yo's tower that lends to the monastery the appearance of a medieval feudal castle and that was built in the middle of the courtyard in 1333-1335 is from before the Revival. It was built by a local feudal lord and patron of the monastery. Hrel'yo's tower is authentic. It is a slim, square building, 23 meters high, 7.75 meters wide and 8.20 meters long. The walls are supported by 12 piers. There was a dungeon in the basement; the Chapel of the Transfiguration is on the main storey and to the northwest and south it is surrounded by a covered gallery where unique medieval frescoes



are extant, exquisite, harmonious and as poetic as the texts which they illustrate.

You can enter the monastery only through one of the two huge iron-studded gates. From 1830 onwards the monastery had its own guards, 150 in number, who wore a characteristic uniform. Designed to parry attacks, the monastery's solid walls are made of pink gray stone and seem to be part of the mountain; they resemble a circle of lava that a good volcano has spouted forth. The embrasure windows gape at visitors with narrow and seemingly malicious eyes.

Insurmountable from the outside, the monastery building inside is spacious and well lit, exquisite and majestic. The total built-up area is 32,000 square meters; the number of premises is 300 or so of which the guest parlors opened and maintained by the donor towns Koprivshtitsa, Teteven and Chirpan are the prettiest. The wings which are a symphony in white, yellow, red, black and brown resemble colorful Bulgarian embroidery. It is a real Renaissance-style palace, amazingly majestic and intimate, with graceful fretwork multicolor facades. Covered gallery balconies with serene amiable colors, all in the shade or basking in the sun, supple lines of white columns framed with red or black contours, merry corners with arched facades, a lace work of open air stairs resembling stairs in a giant ship with many docks - all this is the Rila Monastery.

In 1778 brigands set the monastery on fire which was disastrous. In 1784 it was rebuilt to an extent. A real renaissance started in 1816-1818. Master Alexi Rilets started building the Samokov Gate and in that same year built the whole southeast corner with two rows of extremely exquisite arches of which the lower row was sort of a plinth for the upper row. A chance fire in 1833 practically destroyed the monastery and reduced it to rubble. The solid pillars in the grip of iron frames were spared and are still in place. That part of the monastery



was rebuilt right after the fire and looked what it is today. The best Bulgarian builders, sculptors, icon painters and carvers were involved. The money was contributed on a voluntary basis from all over the country. In 1834 master Krustyo added a storey. And as woodwork was his craft, his storey has pillars, capitals and balconies all of wood. This is a lovely and original diffusion of wood and stone as building materials that is unparalleled in Europe. The southern wing was the last to be finished, in 1847-1848, for the serious impediments owing to the site slope. Master Milenko built additional three storeys outside to balance with the inside. His monumental architecture employed monumental means of expression which make it prettier and the rhythm livelier. Nonetheless the Rila Monastery is a religious ensemble consisting of six churches and chapels. There are six other churches in the vicinities; the extant frescoes are dated to different periods; the frescoes in the Orlitsa convent are the oldest. Two chapels are an absolute must. St John the



Precursor was a winter church, that is why before the restoration in 1968 the frescoes were very dark. The Chapel of the Archangels underneath has oil wall paintings which have lost none of their freshness.

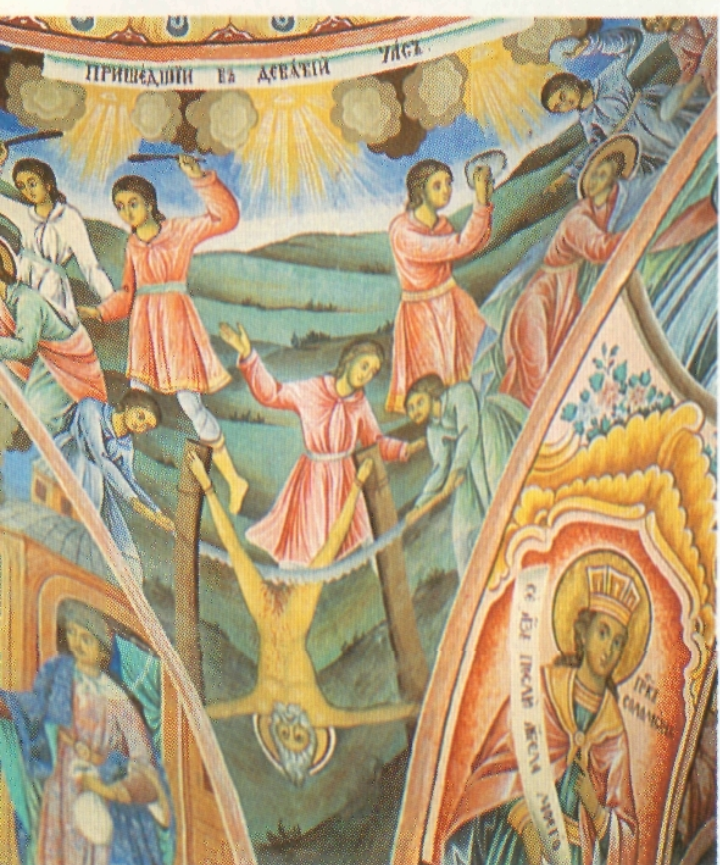
The monastery church is extremely harmonious, with excellent acoustics achieved by clever architectural techniques and pots immured under the central dome. It is the biggest monastery church in Bulgaria, a gorgeous architectural bird of paradise crowned with three big and two smaller domes, all in horizontal stripes which are black-and-white in the lower part and red and white in the upper part, a brilliant example which is in perfect harmony with the severity of Hrelyo's tower and the fretwork lace of monastery wings.

The church was built by Pavel Iovanovich who started it in 1834 and finished it in 1837. In fact the monks sent several missions to study the specifics of the Athonite churches and the merits of many other houses of prayer. As a result the builder's task seemed fully unrealizable: he had to bring in one harmonious whole all that was good, that the brethren saw during their mission. It is to be wondered how master Pavel did it at all; that he had difficulties is evident from the somewhat over-ornate appearance, especially in the roof, and some compromises with the planning. Otherwise he was definitely successful as evident from the interior decoration with the irresistible power of wall paintings, the shining chandeliers and the warm glimmer of the gilt.

The woodwork ensemble of the Rila Monastery is unparalleled in Bulgaria in quality and diversity. The light caresses the surface, penetrates deep, shapes the forms and allows to trace the intricate paths of the artist's flight of imagination to which goodness and







simplicity give warmth. The carving in the Main Church is fascinating in the glamour of the largest icon screen in Bulgaria and is as impressive in the small temples - at the graveyard, in the hermitage of St Luka and in several chapels scattered on one storey or another. The gates of the Orlitsa convent are miraculous; the icon screen in the Chapel of St John that is visibly earlier and clearly brought from a chapel of the old church and adapted is amazingly graceful. The icon screen of the Intercession of the Virgin was most probably made by masters coming from Bansko; it has achieved surprising balance between the baroque and the classicist style that was to follow in the evolution of carving.

In 1839 Atanas Teladour, a name already mentioned in the chapter on Samokov, started making the central Rila icon screen, a remarkable element of the Main Church decoration. In 1842 he finished his masterpiece along with the magnificent carved canopy over the altar table. The gilding was attributed later to impart a different effect especially when touched by a sun's ray that has squeezed through; then the gold of the sun mingles with the gilding of the carving forms and gives the feeling of bright joy. It is a really centrally concave baroque altar composed not as a facade of an ancient temple but as the face of a secular palace. Teladour had predilection for floral motifs, birds and fabulous creatures which he very seldom treats on their own. Angels supporting medallions with the portraits of prophets and saints that are

very much reminiscent of good Western religious painting are placed in the vine alone over the cornice of the first storey.

The icons in the Main Church were painted from 1840 to 1847. That prestigious effort was joined by painters and apprentices from four families of icon painters in Samokov and Bansko. The icon painters started work while the wall was still wet with plaster and put the finishing touches in tempera. The donors' portraits are most interesting in the whole ensemble; those of chorbadji Vulko Chalukov and his wife Rada are the best portraits ever painted in the Revival period. The painters were Dimiter and his son Simeon, both from the Molerov family in Bansko. They did credit to the founder of this artistic family, Toma Vishanov-Molera. He painted the monastery and the hermitage of St Luka and tried to harmonize the two greatest schools of art, that of Byzantium and that of Western Gothic, to bring god down to earth and elevate man, to paint even a nude in a religious picture that was absolutely admissible in Western church art. The church prelates regarded it as blasphemy and shame and for more than ten years the talented artist was not allowed to cross the solid monastery gates. Every inch of the open narthex around the western facade features saints and sinners, devils and angels, in bright gay colors that become even more contrasting when the rising sun shines on them; the arcades are decorated with over 1200 scenes. It took 32 whole years to paint them but evidently the achievement was worth the time.





It is quite an easy itinerary. 24 kilometers after the motorway to Pernik branches off, the left side takes you to E-79 international motorway to Greece. Road signs read “Kulata” all the way: this is the cross-border check-point. Doupnitsa is at a distance of 68 kilometers. A detour to the left before will take you to Sapareva Banya, a famous spa in the picturesque valley of the river Djerman between the mountains Rila and Verila, at an altitude of 725 meters. It is the successor of the ancient Germanea whose name apparently is to be traced to the Sanskrit word “germa” which means hot. The hottest water in Bulgaria spouts there: it is a geyser which is 7-8 meter high; the discharge is 2005 liters per minute; the temperature is 103°C. The temperature of the other springs varies between 38 and 90°C; the water contains little minerals, sulfate/sodium and sulfides, silicon and fluorine, the pH is highly active - 8.8 and 0.3 “soft” German



degrees, and cures mainly diseases of the bones and joints; cocciarthrosis is a special indication.

DOUPNITSA

is a nice, green, calm big municipal center with a population of 42,153 in 1987. The town is situated in the gorge of the river Djerman whose floods were the most horrible natural disaster for decades. There is nothing to prove that Doupnitsa was there in the time of the First Bulgarian Kingdom. It was mentioned in 1280-1323 under the reign of the Terter dynasty for the border between the Turnovo Kingdom and the lands of Konstantin of Velbuzhd along what are now the outskirts.

In 1499 the Rhine knight Arnold Harf wrote down in his diary that it was a nice town. In 1836 Ami Boue reported 6000 inhabitants, 2000



houses and a very long street running along the river. The old Church of St George with a clock tower from late 18th century has survived from those days. For the first time in Bulgaria the builder replaced the upper stone parts with a wooden storey so that the iron clockwork would not go rust. Doupnitsa was famous for its iron mongers; the axes of the Turkish cannons were made there.

Doupnitsa endowed Bulgaria with many freedom fighters, all of them striking personalities. Executions were in the evening and an elm tree in the yard of the Church of St Nicholas was the gallows of the ones who had been caught. A reading club was opened in 1858, just two years after the first club was set up in Svishtov. The country's first teacher-training school was established in 1880. A library was opened in 1895. Thousands of refugees from Macedonia came and returned to and from the south seven or eight times after the Liberation and the many uprisings. When the First Balkan War was





declared on October 18, 1912 the first casualty of the triumphant Bulgarian army was a man from Doupnitsa. A narrow-gauge railway was built for the needs of the army; the normal Radomir-Doupnitsa railway went into operation much later, on December 21, 1930.

BLAGOEVGRAD

That real capital of Pirin Macedonia is situated in a small pretty valley which is 12 kilometers long and 8 kilometers wide at the gentle foothills of the Rila and Vlahina Mountains. Blagoevgradska Bistritsa is the 42-kilometer long river which flows across the town and into the Strouma 4 kilometers south of Blagoevgrad. Attractive birds of



passage hover over and around the mouth of the river most of the year. Earth dikes prevent floods that may be very dangerous; many walls of stone have been built for the same reason. The central town bridge is at an altitude of 383.2 meters. The altitudes of the sprawling neighborhoods vary and 450 meters is the highest point.

Blagoevgrad and particularly the resort part downtown is very green. The accesses to the town and the environs are green. Bodrost locality is 29 kilometers away, in the southwestern part of Rila, with scenic forests and waterfalls; the 30 meter high fall at Kartal Dere swarms with fish. Parangalitsa is 4 kilometers farther in the bosom of the mountain, an amazing nature reserve at an altitude that starts at 1470 meters and covers an area of 1580 hectares. The forest concentration is unusual; with 1600 cubic meters of wood per hectare this place ranks first in Central Europe. The giant spruce

and fir trees are 300 years old; individual trees are up to 2 meters thick; a 63 meter tall spruce tree is believed to be the tallest tree on the continent, moreover, it continues to grow.

Blagoevgrad's lovely atmosphere is largely due to the mild and sparing climate which is transitory between the temperate continental and the Mediterranean with constant gentle wind coming from the mountain along the path of the river course. There are 120 hours of sunshine and 2350 hours altogether yearly. The mean temperature in the town is 12.6°C with a maximum of 23.2°C in July and a minimum of 1.2°C in January. The air humidity is moderate, 67%; precipitation is low, 525 l/sq m, the figure for the country being 650. A spell of drought often is as long as three



months. There are maximum 18 days with fog yearly; snow is scanty, as thin as 40 cm, and will not stay for more than 24 days.

Blagoevgrad publishes a newspaper; there is a renowned theater, libraries and eventful cultural life. The internationally known Pirin ensemble that brings the magic of Pirin folklore to the world is based there. The Roussalia Games hold a special place in the choreographic heritage of that region. The games were performed 12 days a year only, from the second day of Christmas to Epiphany. The Roussalia were up to 30 pairs of male dancers; their costume resembled that of the Greek eusons. On the days of the games they performed very queer rituals: they would not see members of their families; they would not touch a woman; they would not make the sign of the cross; they would be dumb. The pairs were inseparable. When they danced their peculiar dances no one was

allowed to cross the dancers' line. The money raised from donations was usually contributed to build a new church. There is a tradition that Roussalia money built the Church of the Presentation of the Virgin in 1844 distinguished for its interesting architectural style and lavish decoration in which the carvers and painters who had worked for the Rila Monastery put their heart and ability.

Human presence is detected from the New Stone Age onwards. Remains of a Neolithic settlement were found in 1959 at Dolno Tserovo, a village nearby. The settlement was within the Macedon Empire under Philip II; the town museum possesses coins that feature Macedonian kings. The town's names that have come down to us are: Scaptopara, Iokari Djoumaya, Gorna Djoumaya and today's Blagoevgrad. Scholars attribute Scaptopara to a famous fair as in Thracian "scapto" means upper and "para" means marketplace. The busy place was located in the common of the village of Stroumski Chiflik, some 3 kilometers south of Blagoevgrad. The fair continued for 15 days and the transactions were exempted from taxes, sort of a present-day free trade zone. Excavations have produced plenty of archaeological finds that went to make rich museum collections. Yet the most valuable monument from the time dealt with is a stone slab that has disappeared. The French Byzantinologist Capelas came across the slab and recorded it in 1868 in the village of Gramada, today a residential area of Blagoevgrad. The Scaptopara inscription in Greek and Latin dates from 238. Lands along the middle course of the Strouma were incorporated to Bulgaria by virtue of a treaty between king Boris I and Byzantium in 864. Boris was the first Bulgarian Christian ruler who was converted to the new religion to dispel the biases with regard to pagans as outside the laws of Christendom and therefore no need to fulfill the obligations undertaken vis-a-vis them. The Bulgarian state was the



force that held together the Southern Slavs and as such it was a serious obstacle to Byzantium's policy seeking to assimilate them. Hence the fierceness of Bulgarian-Byzantine relations through all their history.

Iokari Djoumaya appears first on a Turkish document of 1502. Mineral springs were the incentive to settle there. Five baths were built in the 16th century; water was used for laundry too; water spouted in the troughs themselves and the jet was so strong that it could set in motion a mill stone. The waters have been and are rationally used; hydrological research was done in 1939; catchment was done on the following year. The discharge is 1020 liters per minute; the mean temperature is 55°C; the water contains hydrogen sulfide and sulfate which are best for the treatment of chronic joint rheumatism, arthritis, lumbago, sciatica and a number of skin diseases.

Initially the town was exclusively Turkish but someone had to do the work after all, so Bulgarians moved and settled there gradually. The river divided the town in two halves: the Turks occupied the right bank around the spring; the Bulgarian neighborhood Varosha was on the left bank. The town began to grow intensively owing to its favorable location in late 18th century; crafts developed; trade was very brisk. Timber was a common item of trade; a local man used the Strouma as a waterway and in 1863-1866 took rafts as far as Thessaloniki several times.

The clock tower was built in the eastern part of the city in 1867. A Bulgarian community was organized in 1871 and its first care was to build a big school. Arseni Kostentsev who came to the town in 1872 to teach at that school introduced the sound method to replace the syllable method that had been used in teaching prior to his arrival. The one method was to train priests and the other, teachers and

educated people. Kostentsev was more than a teacher; he was a revolutionary leader and the staff room was a real depot. Heroes in that region were tempered with fire and blood. Georgi Izmirliiev, the Macedonian who finished the military school in Odessa and was the second apostle of the Turnovo Revolutionary District was the most prominent figure. He was betrayed and caught and told the Turkish judges: "All I have is my soul. Take it." On May 28, 1876



he put the noose round his neck and cried: "How sweet it is to die for the freedom of the homeland."

Some 20,000 mulberry trees were planted in the environs in 1863 to encourage silkworm breeding. The rice that was grown from 1864 onwards was a top quality product which sold well. Tobacco with flavoring yellow-red leaves for which there was demand all the way to Austria was the major trade. The river watered well the sandy soil; there was abundant rain in May and June which is the time when tobacco was planted and grew; the August heat increased its flavor. Most of the townspeople earned their living from tobacco; later office workers and craftsmen had tobacco fields; some 20 per cent of the townspeople worked in the tobacco sheds.

Today tobacco takes up 23 per cent of the area of Bulgarian industrial crops. Indeed, it is just 2.5 per cent of the arable land but



it generates 15 per cent of the gross agricultural product, accounts for 10 per cent of the agricultural employment and together with the processed tobacco products makes up for over 10 per cent of the national export. What used to be Blagoevgrad district produces 30 per cent of Bulgaria's Oriental tobacco; the Nevrokop and Doupnitsa Basma varieties that are grown there require thin skeletal warm soils that are poor in humus but rich in calcium. There is a tobacco experimental station in the town of Rila; curing is in Doupnitsa and Blagoevgrad; cigarettes are made in Bulgartabac in Blagoevgrad. Gorna Djoumaya was the only town in Macedonia fortunate to welcome the Russian liberators, hold free elections, have local authorities and police though in the beginning the policemen did not have a uniform and wore their own clothes with the letter P made of tin on their breast. Having tasted of independence it was parched by the cruel revision by the Berlin Treaty signed on July 13, 1878. A state border was drawn across the Bulgarian lands to divide a

people with a common history and past and common national struggle and to open a gaping wound in the soul of the nation. That real monument of egoism that deserves the negative assessment of historians and politicians that it receives did more than just ignoring the will of nations and ethnic realities; it became the cause for the decades of political tensions in that region that has become the powder keg of the Balkans.

Gotse Delchev, "the righteous man with a dagger in his belt", dedicated his youth and life to the struggle to materialize the thwarted national ideal. For nine years he was an apostle who went through thick and thin. Gotse insisted that all men are brothers; it is his aphorism "I see the world solely as a field of cultural competition between nations". He knew the answer corresponding with time and had the stamina to resist plunging into reckless action; he knew how to think and how to translate his thoughts into action, without any promises that lead to disappointment. It is his honesty that is to be blamed for his heroic death at the village of Banitsa: he knew that the Turks would set on fire a village that had given shelter to revolutionaries, so he tried to take his people out of the village in broad daylight.

Georgi Delchev was born in 1872 in Koukoush. Gotse was the name of endearment at home, as the Bulgarian tradition is. He graduated from the Thessaloniki Highschool which was the best school in Macedonia opened in 1880 to crown the campaign of establishing Bulgarian schools. That highschool "manufactured" Macedonian revolutionary leaders as Eton and Harrow molded British statesmen.

Driven away from Thessaloniki the highschool moved to Petrich, Shtip and Strumitsa before it found refuge in Blagoevgrad in 1920. In 1933 a new school house was opened. Ever





since the highschool was established it has born the names of the saints Cyril and Methodius. The monk Constantine Cyril, the Philosopher died in 869 in Rome and was canonized in the 11th century which was an early canonization. He entered European iconography inseparable from his brother Methodius. The two men were called “Equals to the Apostles”, i.e. the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ, the top rung of the Christian hierarchical ladder. Cyril and Methodius invented the



Slavonic alphabet at the time of the three-tongue dogma which allowed to preach in Latin, Greek and Hebrew alone for these were the tongues in which the inscription on the cross on which Jesus was crucified that Pontius Pilate ordered was written. In this social context their initiative to add Slavonic to the languages of divine service was an intellectual and political feat in Europe. Chronologically the fourth literary language in Europe Slavonic became the first new language to be used in religious service and culture on the continent. By a strange and funny play of history the script that Cyril and Methodius invented and the literature that was written in it intended as a weapon of Byzantine diplomacy was consecrated in Rome, materialized dramatically in Great Moravia and returned finally to the real country of origin where it genuinely flourished. Late come freedom resulted in a delay in the town's economic and socio-political life. Drinking water was a grave problem. The town

pump used to be where Gotse's monument stands today. A small water-supply utility was built as late as 1937. Today the town drinks excellent water coming from Chekalitsa, a locality in Rila. The clouds of mosquitoes over the swamps along the Strouma transmitted malaria. Paraffin lamps remained in use till 1929; the first motion pictures show used a storage battery; there was one kerosene lamp in the Ohrid cafe. A narrow-gauge railway was the transport service. It took between eight and nine hours to reach Petrich; often the train was derailed but luckily easy to put back in place. The normal railway opened as late as 1937; king Boris III who attended the ceremony enjoyed driving the engine himself which he often did. That picture, grim as it was, was not paralleled in culture. The Suglasie reading club was set up in 1914. In 1919 a refugee, Nikola Devedjiev by name, established a printing house; the first local newspaper was



printed and it was not accidental that its title was "Makedonska Sulza", (Macedonian Tear). The town theater opened in 1926. The people of Gorna Djoumaya cherished the motto of the Bulgarian Revival: "We shall not give what's ours; we shall not take what's not ours". This is the guiding principle of the many schools, technical colleges, two universities - a Bulgarian and an American, the entire lively and ambitious intellectual life of this big town whose civic center seems to have come from a future century.



In the 16th-17th century Bansko was a speck on the vast Ottoman Empire. With a population of 9000 in 1870 Bansko was as big as Sofia. Prior to the Napoleonic Wars Bansko was an international trade center via which the Aegean cotton that was as good as the Bengalese and as competitive as the Egyptian cotton was exported to Vienna, the merry capital of the Hapsburgs, where it was so much valued. Other exports were flavoring tobacco, black opium, leather, aniseed, sesame, carders, church candles all of which were to be thanked for Bansko's Golden Age. The local people blessed these profitable businesses and trade that enabled them to join the cream of Balkan society. In 1766 a total of 134 Balkan merchants were registered in Vienna; there were 1159 Balkan companies in another twelve towns and quite a big number of the richest merchants were from Bansko.

The altitude is 930 meters. Razlog, Yakorouda and Dobrinishte (the latter is next door) are at a lower altitude. Bansko is a terminal of the most attractive railway in Bulgaria that runs via Avramovi Kolibi, the station at the highest altitude (1267 meters). Usually it is road access to Bansko. E-79 motoway forks at Simitli, the road and Gradevo run in parallel for miles. Then it goes via the incredibly scenic Predela before it reaches the Razlog Valley which is a cup locked between the Rila, Pirin and Rhodope Mountains. The valley used to be a hot lake where traces can be detected in the hot springs in the village of Banya (over 20!), Dobrinishte, Eleshnitsa and Bansko itself. Razlog, the onetime Mehomia, which is 6 kilometers north of Bansko, is the bigger of the two, with a population of 16,000, well developed



industry, nice-looking and green downtown area and plenty of opportunities for tourism. Bansko is not without modern industries either: there is a big telephone plant; Bansko chairs sell well in Europe; the children's wooden toys have reputation.

The local people were and apparently are somewhat peculiar. Their dialect is idiosyncratic and outsiders can't understand it. The flow of speech has a melodious tinge; the vocals are long; the consonants are sonorous; there are many words of endearment and address, with such subtle meanings and nuances that are not to be found even in the nearest villages around. The Bansko heavy dance of men, of warriors, a dance that might have been performed by Homer's heroes, is specific.

The local people were striking personalities. For 25 years one of them, Mihail German by name, was an all-powerful adviser to the Serbian prince Milos. For this reason Vuk Karadzic's big folklore collection included folk songs from Bansko and Bulgarian books were printed immediately and for nothing in the royal printing house. Marko Georgievich-Vezyuv was fluent in eight languages and rolling in money. He gave the money to build the first saw-mill; he donated a site and money to build the first school in 1858. For his "theater house" the local people made a curtain that was the most eccentric one in Bulgaria: it was shaped as a roulette in which hundreds of wooden laths were held together by a belt. Marko Vezyuv's greatest contribution was the sum donated in 1792 to print the first Bulgarian primer, 32 years before Dr Peter Beron's Fish Primer.

The local people in Bansko will tell you many curious stories. Here is





one: the celebrated Hadji Kandit Dugaradin had to go underground on account of his revolutionary activity; one day he attended his own funeral service in Bansko. The Todev family was famous and many stories are told about them. For twelve years Nikola Todev was Razlog's representative in the struggle for church independence in Istanbul. A band of brave men from Bansko led by Blago Todev dealt with highwaymen in Mozgovitsa locality. Before they set off the priest served funeral mass as some or all might be killed. The men returned and each had two rifles. As simple as that. It was Todev's band again that dealt with bandits in a place called Glavite (The Heads) for understandable reasons. Another Todev set the family inn in the marketplace on fire to create confusion and get the ransom for Miss Stone, a missionary and hostage. The ransom was needed to buy arms for the organization. The voivoda Todev and the men of his band were killed in a battle which was so fierce that the rocks around were hot with the shots.



Bansko's Golden Age endowed Bulgaria with Paissi. That titan of the Revival was born in 1722 in a rich and eminent family of Bansko. One of his brothers, Lavrenti, chose his vocation in the Orthodox monastic republic of Mount Athos. In his old age he became a monastery librarian to be the keeper of the most precious possession of a monastery and donated his father's house in Bansko to be converted to a monastery branch. Paissi's other brother, Hadji Vulcho (in Bulgaria a hadji is a man who has visited the Holy Land, and Vulcho did it three times) had an even more interesting life. He had caravans of hundreds of horses, his own army of armed Turkish mercenaries, an inn in Serres region that could accommodate 500, counting offices in Budapest, Vienna and Kavalla, his own bridges at Nevrokop, across the Mesta and Kaniga. In 1757 he paid to rebuild the Hilendar Monastery's southern wing; two years he paid to build the eastern wing of the Zographou compound and for centuries the five-storey building was called Bansko neighborhood; in 1764 he



made a contribution to build the Church of the Assumption of the Virgin. On the beadroll Hadji Vulcho is side by side with king Ivan Assen II and Ivan Alexander and for two centuries now his name has been mentioned in Holy Liturgy. After many years his grandsons visited the monastery but were led out to enter again so as to welcome them with gonfalons and solemnly ringing bells.

Paissi was 23 when he became a monk in the Hilendar Monastery and 33 when he became a collector of donations; from 1760 he was a deputy abbot. He died at 51. It is believed that he conceived his "Slav-Bulgarian History of the Bulgarian People, Kings and Saints and of All Bulgarian Acts and Events" in 1761-1762. Paissi met monks and pilgrims from different nationalities; he travelled in Bulgaria and other lands; he raked the libraries in Mount Athos, scholars have established that he referred to 45 sources. That book



of ecstasy with the glorious past and of despair with the tragic present day is a profoundly optimistic work that is still read for he who catches the spirit of time belongs afterwards to the future. No wonder that over 60 transcripts (the first one was made by Sofroni of Vratsa in 1765) have come down to us.

The second great native of Bansko, Neofit of Rila (1793-1881) was educated in the Rila Monastery, Melnik, Bucharest. In 1835 he became the first truly secular teacher in the famous Aprilov High-school in Gabrovo. After Gabrovo the monk began to receive plenty of offers as if he were a miracle worker. The Bulgarians who are somewhat prone to heresy and theomachy worshipped the great monks and patriarchs for their educational work rather. Neofit himself sermonized: "Build schools first and churches and monasteries after."

Till his last day Neofit indefatigably pursued his mission of bringing Bulgarian children to the education of Europe. He compiled a reader in the Slavonic language; he translated AEsop; he wrote a description of the Rila Monastery; for dozens of years he worked to compile a dictionary of oral and written Bulgarian. Neofit composed the first New Bulgarian language grammar which paved the way to standard Bulgarian. Neofit made the first translation of the New Testament printed in 30,000 copies, an incredible quantity in those days.

The Church of the Virgin in the graveyard is the oldest church in Bulgaria. It was built in the time of the Shishman dynasty; the year 1211 can be seen on the southern wall. The church as it looks today was built in the 15th century; the western part dates from 1760. In fact the Small Church is not that small; it measures 24 x 11 meters; it was built of white stone in a peculiar way, as if for services for a



congregation of people of flesh and blood and not for funeral mass. The underground is three steps below the zero level; the wall mortar resembles marble and doesn't scale off; it is said that it was prepared with a mixture of milk and eggs instead of water. The walls are almost 1 meter thick; it is a building designed to be more than a house of prayer; it was a castle as evident from the traces of bullets and scimitars on the gates.

The icon stand for the funeral service can compare in splendor with that of the Rila Monastery alone even after the devastating fire in 1958 whose flames consumed Toma Vishanov's icons. The creeping vines, angels and saints beam with vigor. This may explain why the altar doors and the southernmost part of the icon screen that the Turks pillaged are to be found in the London Museum today.

The belfry of the Holy Trinity Church is like a graceful bride against the



Todor Hadjiradonov. He made a first prototype of wood and after he made sure it worked, made two of wrought iron. One of the clocks had four faces and struck every round hour. It was sold to the Zographou Monastery so that the pious monks could know how far the world had advanced.

The Holy Trinity Church is the largest, most interesting and richest in the Pirin area. It measures 44 x 22 meters and the vault is 20 meters tall. Eight pairs of pillars not of stone but of robust fir trunks held together by tarred ropes, pillars that are eternal and strong like the spirit of the local people, support the vault. The clever locals cajoled Turkish money for the construction of the church; they insisted that the Virgin was Mohammed's sister; the crescent and the cross coexist over the stone gate.

Some 350 builders and apprentices worked to build what was a real palace in those days. Straight lines and gracefully calm and laconic



background of the Pirin Mountains. That element of the townscape is inviting to look at, being terrestrial and celestial all in one. No explanation has been given so far about how Bansko obtained a permission in 1846 to have it. But it is a fact that the name of sultan Abdul Hamid is still on the biggest bell. Perhaps that was the compromise.

The 30 meter tall tower was built under the supervision of master builder Gliga Doyuv. The upper part holds the belfry with the clock. The clockwork was made in 1866 by

motifs prevail; elliptical windows can be seen on the high stone apse - baroque had already arrived. The ceiling features a sky with stars; the icon screen of master Velyan Ognev is a big fantasy in wood. The carving beams with vigor, grape clusters and flowers with perfect outlines, and countless birds try to outdo each other in this blossoming garden. It seems the icon screen is an apotheosis of this sinful and real world where the Molerovs' red golden icons shine. The town icon collection for which you are kindly advised

to allow enough of your time displays their works that have been arranged with fineness and taste.

Toma Vishanov was the progenitor of this eminent family. He was born in 1750. Most facts of his life are obscure and it is the original artist rather than the man who has come down to us from the darkness of time. His striking personality defied two periods in East European painting. He separated the Bulgarian from the Greek icon and his art was a challenge to the prevailing taste and call for national identity. His extant sketches show that he painted with great freedom and ease; the personal touch in his works encompasses



all color shades with characteristic silvery and greenish-brown tones. His biblical personages and plots exhibit softness and mellowness of line; he was the artist of perfect Bulgarians, of the happy faces.

His son Dimiter painted remarkable works that are to be found across Bulgaria. Beside he had a book on icon painting published in Italy, sort of a manual for beginner icon painters, at a time when everyone would not share his ability and secrets of trade. His son Simeon Molerov was reputed and had many customers. He had a studio in Thessaloniki of all the places. However, he was happiest



when he worked in Bulgaria. When the Turks pierced the eyes of all the icons in the Holy Trinity Church he repainted them.

Culture, liberal outlook, ideas and lifestyle of the Bansko man were behind the appearance and spirit of his house which was a solid and invincible fortress. Bansko is a town of secrets. Houses are barely seen from the street, hidden behind the stone walls that exceed human height, with rock pieces that float free in the masonry; white joints



surround these pieces which sink in them like a stone thrown into white foam. Huge iron studded gates of fir wood will stop you or let you in.

The local people could go all around Bansko without going out in the street. They had wickets, secret doors and even tunnels to escape to the mountain. This created a legendary underground Bansko where each house was a castle and in each castle there was at least one brave man, so brave that his wife would encourage a Turk who wanted to enter with "Master, please come in."

It's either you or he." The fence of Sirleshtov's house is as high and thick as the fence of a church, that is to say, a peaceful home of unwarlike people. The strongest castle that the then Bansko builders built was behind the fence. The house of the parents of Nikola Vaptsarov (1909-1942) whose verses have been translated into over 30 languages is a similar solid castle. It is the town museum today which is a must. Beside being fortresses, these houses are warm and inviting, comforta-



ble and nice-looking. Velyan's house which is nestled amongst the yards is the prettiest. As it always shows one face only, you don't really perceive how big it is. It was bought and transformed by master Velyan Ognev who came to Bansko in 1835 with the ambition to paint the church. Todev's big house that was built in 1864 is a rival. Its most attractive element, the chimneys, forms a real fossil forest.

Bansko is a dear child of the mountain, a keeper and herald of its legend. The proud Pirin which is awe-



some rather than admirable is immortalized in folklore and perhaps by all Bulgarian poets. It used to have the name Orbelos, the Snow-White. Pirin derived from Perun, the Slav god of lightning and thunder, whose throne was there as Zeus' was on Mount Olympus. Time and prehistoric glacial movements have scarred the high slopes with stool-shaped crevices that are clustered together. Vassilashki which is just 45 minute walking distance from Demyanitsa, one of the three chalets in the vicinities of Bansko, is the most scenic of all cirques. Bunderitsa is the oldest chalet in Pirin; it was opened in 1915. Vihren is the largest. Okoto (The Eye) is a round glistening lake within a quarter of an hour walking distance and on a scenic spot.

The central office of the Pirin National Park which is the largest one in Bulgaria with an area of 40,066.7 hectares of which 2873 hectares are a reserve is in Bansko, side by side with the railway station. That fantastic world has been recorded on the UNESCO List for the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage. The black fir which grows in the Balkans and nowhere else is the most interesting tree species. The long life span of these trees is impressive. The Baikoushev Fir which is 7 or 8 minutes walking distance from Bunderitsa, on the way to Vihren chalet, is more than 1300 years old, a coeval of the state and a dumb witness of its history. Two other black fir trees that are over 1000 years old have been discovered in the Bayuvi Douпки reserve which comprises 10 per cent of the total area of the Pirin Park, that reserve has been included in the UNESCO Man and Biosphere Program.

Vihren, the highest mount in Pirin (2914 meters) rises like a marble pyramid with walls that are so straight that you may think a human hand has made it. Vihren resembles an ancient extinct volcano, a





Mount Fuji in Pirin landscape. In winter the impression of being extinct is not that definite; it looks like a smoking volcano because of the battering wind which scoops snow from the mount to make a swirl. Vihren is quite overbearing and majestic. Its symbol is the edelweiss which blossoms in July and August. The flower can be found in the marble part of Vihren's eastern slopes to Mount Razlozhki Souhodol. However, it is strictly prohibited to pick it.

Pirin is the queen of mountains and each season is charming in its own way. Spring is merry and generous; first comes the white spring when trees wear wedding gowns; next comes the green spring of grass and tree buds and of foliage, as fresh as nephritis. Summer is attractive for the brocade of luxurious vegetation and the tracery of cascades that foam amidst the rocks. There are several big waterfalls that Pirin is famous for: Damyanishki, Yulenski, Bundereshki Skok. No wonder that Bansko is a renowned skiing center with regular patrons mostly from Sofia. There are three chair lifts in the vicinities of the town: one with vertical drop 880 meters and carrying capacity 500 persons per hour runs from the Akademika sports and hiking base to the Tsrna Mogila runs which are good for skiing throughout the year; one with a vertical drop 706 meters and carrying capacity 800 persons per hour for the runs on the northern slopes of Todorka (2746 meters). From the direction of Bansko Vihren is an exceptionally majestic pointed pyramid that juts upwards on its own between the valleys of Bunderitsa and Demyanitsa. The lower lift station of the third one is in Dobrinishte, a neighbor village. The 11 kilometer long road leads to Gotse Delchev chalet which the lift connects with the Besbog runs. The countless clean and cozy private lodgings and hotels, the intimate restaurants and taverns and the unique Bansko atmosphere will explain the rest...

One would think that the southwestern part of the admirable and magnificently attractive Pirin Mountains that here have lost their Alpine outlook deliberately descends and sprawls to bring in one its celestial charm and purely down-to-earth fantasy. It is nature which is a gift par excellence by any criterion: military, strategic, industrial, economic or esthetic.

Nightingales sing virtually all the day for morning lasts till noon and dusk falls early. Melnik is situated at an altitude of 385 meters; the climate is temperate Mediterranean; the sky is serene; the mean temperature is 14°C; there are over 100 days of sunshine from the morning to the evening. Precipitation is lower than the average figure for the country; rivers are not dry in any season; bracing air penetrates from the direction of the gorge.



Most explorers believe that Melnik derives from the Slav “mel”, meaning white clay, chalk. No wonder as the giant pyramids chiseled by a titanic sculptor, nature, are in the proximity. The pyramids lie on an area of 80 hectares; those near the village of Karlanovo are particularly queer. Water, wind, heat and cold have chiseled most incredible figures in the course of centuries: Gothic temples, minarets, rock mushrooms and crests, fabulous creatures and what not to please any imagination. Basking in the sun the pyramids change color and all the nuances of pink, yellow and lilac. The figures are miraculous at dusk, producing the impression of insurmountable walls around a castle.

The history and culture of Bulgarians and other peoples are covering the earth heaps that seem to have erupted from a monstrous cataclysm and that go with lovely legends that spring up in the

passage of time and lend a romantic tinge to history. Melnik's important strategic position on the ancient Aegean-Danube and Adriatic-Thrace-East crossroads is behind the long life in that region. It seems the Medes had a shrine to Bendis on the Sveti Nikola hill. The settlement was gone in the period of big incursions and ethnic changes in the Balkans, however, the stone carving and epigraphy reveal culture that was original despite the influence of Rome and Greece.

Evidence of new life in what is the town today dates from after it was incorporated to Bulgaria in 846. Historical sources from those centuries seldom mention it and this is a sign, strange as it may sound, of peace and prosperity, and not decline, as if it had been spared the numerous events that were so fateful for the Bulgarian



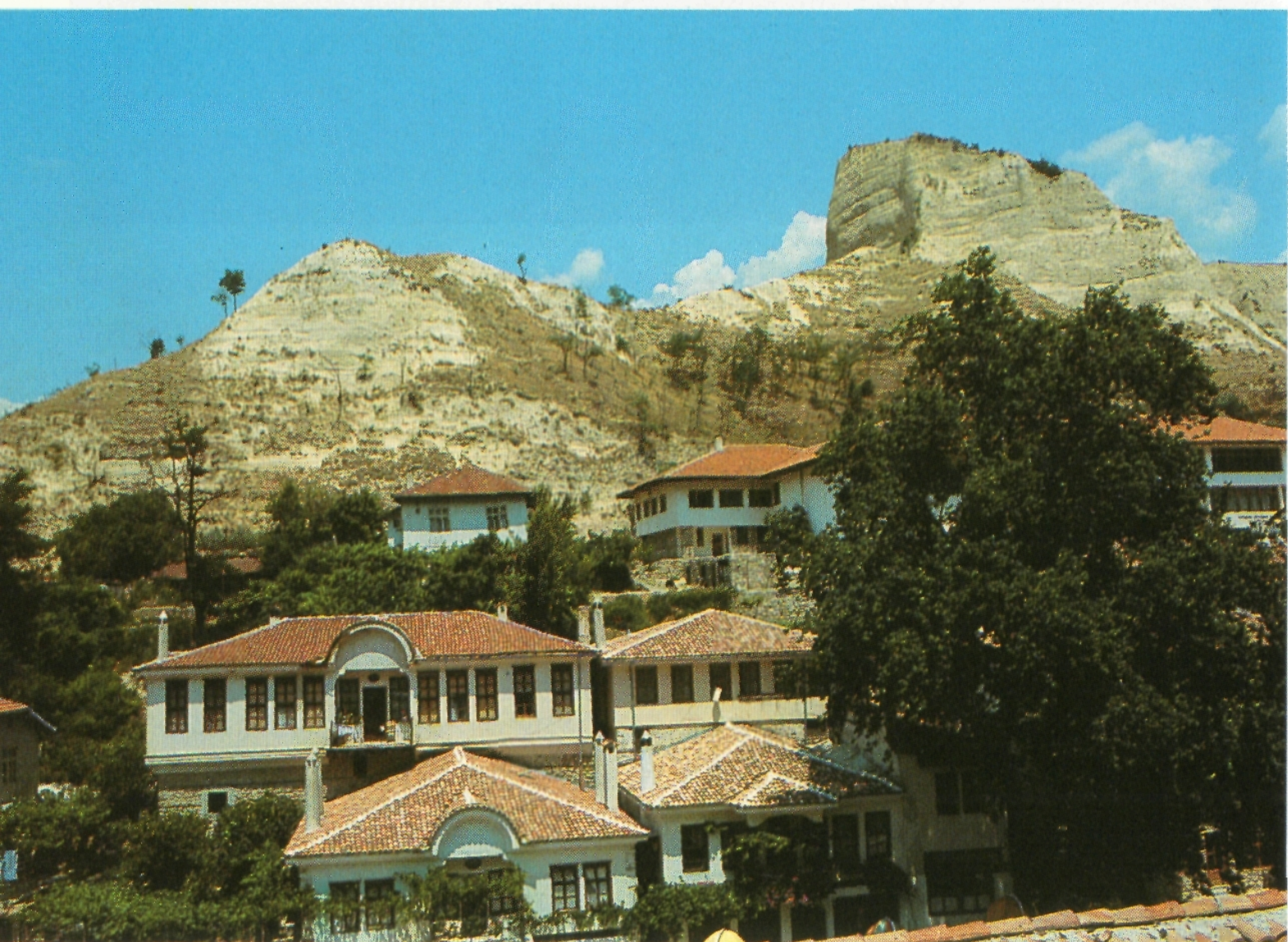
state. In early 11th century the Byzantine historian Scylitzes Cedrenus described it as an invincible fortress; in the 12th century the Arab geographer Al-Idrisi mentioned it in his text and maps as a big and "one of the oldest towns".

Melnik was an important border outpost of which there is evidence in the central part and on the southern plateau. There was a huge three-nave basilica and a fort that nature and human hand had fortified on that highest point and only treason would hand it over to enemy. In 1170 Melnik became a bishop's see and for centuries was of tremendous importance for the church. Under king Ivan Assen II it was within the Bulgarian state that was 30 days long and 10 days wide. Melnik changed hands and was Serbian, then Byzantine, then Bulgarian again. Its men of what not nationality went down in its history. For some time Michael Paleologus, a prominent Byzantine

general and the father of the last Constantinople dynasty, was the ruler of Melnik. Alexi Slav, son of the sister of king Kaloyan (1139-1207), son-in-law of the Latin ruler and relative of the emperor of Epirus Theodore Comnenus, made Melnik his capital in 1205.

The Turkish administration had no particular interest in that town. Till the 17th century colonization was very weak. There is no mention of a local mosque. In 1519 there were 600 Bulgarian households. Greek presence and religious influence were particularly strong. This was because when Mohammed II conquered Constantinople he allowed the Greek patriarch to be the shepherd of all who professed the Christian Orthodox religion. The Greek patriarch had been sort of a political leader of the Christians in the Ottoman Empire since then. Naturally this did not stand in the way to the sultans' occasional outbursts of anger. It was Mohammed II who had the nose of patriarch Joseph cut for a trifle. When the Greek uprising broke out in 1821 the gate beam of the residence of patriarch Gregory VII became his gallows.

Melnik was one of the major centers of the Bogomil movement that originated in the 10th-11th century to become the driving force of all European heresies in the 13th century. The movement left an indelible imprint on the cultural and religious life of the Southern Slavs, Byzantium and Western Europe for almost five centuries after. That movement is perhaps the only ideology upholding the interests of the underprivileged classes and advocating the well-being of men. It was an expression of great power of vision and uncommon



courage to preach that men were equal in the Middle Ages.

The Bogomil movement was not a self-centered exclusively theological doctrine; it was a consistent social movement with a complete cosmogony system which was rare to find in those days. The doctrine claimed that in the beginning it was the good God alone who governed decently all the seven heavens and the four elements - earth, air, fire and water - with his relatives and angels. When his son Sataniel rebelled he was banished to the earth. There he made man but could not bring him to life so God instilled soul in him. This is how dual human nature came into existence. Sataniel inspired the crucifixion of Jesus, so after his resurrection the Nazarene sent him to hell; beside He removed from his name the syllable "el" which signified his divine parentage.

There were three groups of Bogomil followers. The perfect ones were men and even women could make it; the believers lived in communities called fraternities; and the third group was that of listeners.

The Bogomil concept of the origin of the world without from Evil predetermined their attitude to the institutions: they opposed the houses of prayer, liturgy and the authorities. They preached these ideas which were elaborated in their prolific writings of which "The Secret Book" that is the pivot is extant in two Latin translations - Latin and Carcassonne. Another book, "Razumnik", where dogmas and apocrypha, truth and superstition, faith and heresy are mixed, gives the following answer to the question why God made the



woman from the man's rib: "In order to suffer for each other."

Despite the vicissitudes of history remarkable examples of monumental and applied art have survived in that town as evidence of its greatness as a major cultural center in the Bulgarian lands. In fact the town's only street forks along two rivulets. After the Balkan War the rivulets running across the town were three as never before and never since. The Greeks broke their casks with old wine before their flight and a real red river flowed.

Attractive ensembles of Revival period houses are situated as an amphitheater as in Veliko Turnovo against the background of miraculous pyramids that have perched like seagulls. The original architecture has arrested the spirit and atmosphere of the past and is in harmony with the landscape. Houses look like clusters of mushrooms with high ground floors of hewn stone and almost



without windows. The upper storeys are snow-white, and supported by beams; the wooden marquees have iodine color. The tall white chimneys attached to the facades outside resemble fingers vying with the slim poplar trees. An iron knocker featuring a graceful woman's hand on some gates invites you to enter and feel the soul of the home. And there was no yard, the parlor was the soul. Paraskev's house had the largest parlor in Melnik. Musicians from Vienna played on a special stand. Perhaps this is where

the music of the Strausses was first played in Bulgaria.

The oldest house on the Balkan Peninsula built in the 10th-11th century can be seen in Melnik. It is enormous and often called the Big House. The exclusively Bulgarian masonry alternating stones with flat bricks gained it the name the Boyar's Mansion. There is a story that the healing air helped king Boris I's grand-daughter who had problems with breathing. She recovered in the Boyar's Mansion. Perhaps the local ruby wine helped too as she regained her lust for life. There came many suitors, one of who was a Russian prince, Igor, the title hero of "The Lay of Igor's Armies". In Byzantine times it was called the Byzantine Mansion for understandable reasons, or the Black House, for it was intended for royal banishment.

Pashov's house that Bulgarian builders built in 1815 for a Turkish dignitary and that resembles a proud bird with spread wings as if about to fly against the wind is very pretty. Upon Bulgaria's liberation the pasha's heirs led away what they could and that was nine loads

of riches. Kordopoulov's house which is the largest Bulgarian Revival period home with floor space and number of rooms that can rival with real castles is Number One.

Kordopoulov's house was built in 1758. It is on the top of the river gorge, as if sitting on a throne on a stone site. The attractive parlor windows that look in the four directions of the world have Venetian glass. That house of educated and well-to-do people had every imaginable convenience and a home prison for mischievous children, scheming servants and even the lord himself if his account books were not in order.

The most impressive premise is the cellar; it is a three-level labyrinth cut into the rocks with a total length of several kilometers. The barrels were big, the biggest ones for 40,000 liters, and they knew how to store wine for decades. The last offshoot of the great dynasty was educated in wine-making in France of all the countries. The Greek church excommunicated him as he introduced the Bordeaux mixture in vine maintenance and thus contaminated the future Sacrament.

Perhaps the best Bulgarian wine is made in Melnik area. It is made from the well known broad Melnik vine, a special variety from Syria that was transplanted there and able to grow on the southern slopes of the sandy hills of the Pirin Mountains. The grapes are small, with thick skin; they are not delicious to eat but the wine that is made from them is unique: dark red, dry and heavy. You could carry this thick dark wine that could be drunk or chewed in a handkerchief.

The wine made from resins was most famous. Underground cellars cut into the rocks were the "factory". In late 19th century Melnik county comprised 51 villages with 29,902 villagers of who 15,492 were Bulgarians. The 6.5 million kilograms of grapes were transformed into 1.5 million liters of wine. In the town itself the merchant cellars were 19 and everyone made wine. Even the voivoda Sandanski who was a tee-





totaler and who lived for some time there had a small vineyard to cultivate and make wine and brandy for his many visitors. He invited them to the Rozhen Monastery where he had been let two rooms. The big room was his guest parlor where he treated his guests with the elixir; the small room was his bedroom where he slept on a wooden bed whose bed cover was the fur of a giant bear that he had killed with a bare knife when the beast assaulted him for there was a Turkish posse and the fire arm shots would have betrayed him. The merchants of Dubrovnik are to be thanked for the fame of this wine. The caravans, usually of loaded camels, departed on Mondays for Venice, Vienna, Egypt and as far as Madrid along the Wine



Routes. The wine was transported in leather bags for the narrow streets would not allow carts. Some streets were so narrow that would not allow even two horses coming from opposite directions. The Aegean markets were opened in the 17th century. Today the per capita wine production in that region can compete with Moselle or Burgundy. The local people say that they make over 3000 liters a year each and more. And they don't drink it by themselves at that. The taverns in the rocks are always cool and serve a glass of marvelous wine. But why a glass only?...

The Rozhen Monastery is just 6 kilometers away from Melnik, on the heights over the town that are bathing in the sun. The monastery is



mild for the southward warmth of the Aegean Sea penetrates into the river valleys.

People prayed here for more than one thousand years. The monastery has been known though since early 13th century. A charter by despot Alexi Slav granted rights and privileges to a monastery that was built in his days. Another document of 1515 gives evidence that the monastery was there. The Turkish invaders destroyed it time and again but it was rebuilt each time to become what it is today in 1732 and to glorify the human genius of art and architecture.

A steep path will take you to the monastery gate with traces of scimitars and bullets. A small white watch tower over the roof has an eagle's eye visibility. Before you reach the monastery you usually visit the white church perching on the height. It was built with money given by Yane Sandanski to provide a house of prayer to the villagers



encircled by a golden wreath of eroded sandstone canyons. The names of the monastery and its church, The Nativity of the Virgin, derive from Rozhen, a small village nearby. The monastery is at an altitude of 800-900 meters, sheltered in the queer workings of nature. To the east and north it is shielded by the legendary Pirin Mountains, to the south by Alibotoush; Belassitsa rises to the southwest and the gentle folds of Ograzhden sprawl in the west. Despite this high altitude and the proximity of mountains, the climate is

of Rozhen as in those days it was a Greek monastery. It was returned to Bulgaria in 1921, following a ruling of the International Court in the Hague. Yane dedicated the church to SS Cyril and Methodius; there are two very personal portraits among the saints on the icon screen: a small non-canonical portrait of his dear sister Sophia, and an original saint that Sandanski invented and called Saint Freedom Lover. It hardly ever occurred to the apostle that this would be his last resting place with the inscription that was his motto on his grave stone: "Men are born to

fight: the slaves for freedom, the free men for perfection.”

Restoration was very skilful and careful and did not mar at all the authentic appearance of this unique ensemble. It is rather a fortress which it had to be in times of trouble, and self-sufficient.

The first “circle” the exterior, is humble but the interior decoration is admirable: warm woodwork and elegant stairs. The incredible stone-paved corridor which is a lace of light and shade, balconies and colonnades is really fascinating. The second “circle” is a hexagonal structure of dormitories and farm buildings.

The spacious monastery vault is a chamber music hall where Old Bulgarian chants are sung. Next to it there is an exhibition of the monastery’s rich icon possessions. Also the monastery owed its reputation to the scriptorium where the inspiration of unsurpassed masters produced “The Commentary of Job”, a unique work with 117 color miniatures, taken to Jerusalem in 1647. The Church of the Holy Sepulcher keeps the gospel of Dositheus. The extant books that can be seen here are in three languages and three kinds of ink were used to copy them.

The monastery church is the most valuable monument. This three-nave basilica with an altar apse, a southern narthex and a western annex has perfect proportions. The church was built in four stages: 1217, 1511, 1601 and 1732. Built and destroyed, rising from the ashes to be burned down again, rebuilt and devastated, the church is evidence of the tough Balkan spirit in that region in times of trouble.

The monastery church is a fascinating and exquisite blend of murals, woodcarving, icons, stained glass which are in perfect proportion and balance and exert an esthetic impact on the keenness of human perception. The walls are lavishly painted and after cleaning and restoration the frescoes shine in their indescribable mysticism and beauty. The



earliest depictions on the western and southern facade are dated to 1597. Remember that an Orthodox church is conventionally painted first inside and then outside and first in the east and then in the west. Therefore the above year marks the last stage.

The naos paintings are unique versions of Balkan monumental painting in a time of gradual deformation of medieval canons. The faces are expressively plastic; the postures are downright representational; the garments are richly ornamented. Thus depicted the



warrior saints are knights in a tournament rather than martyrs and demystify the religious impact and bring the real world home to us, painted in a festive and bright color range achieved, strange as it may appear, with cold tones. At the entrance the visitor comes across a possible and desired prospect, the famous “Ladder” of 30 rungs corresponding to the 30 virtues, what a big number in those days. The frescoes in the ossuary of St John the Baptist are extremely spectacular and contrast the humble outside appearance. The abundance of green, red and bluish colors create elevation and joy which are not expected to be experienced in an ossuary. The great number of icon screens are the church’s most valuable

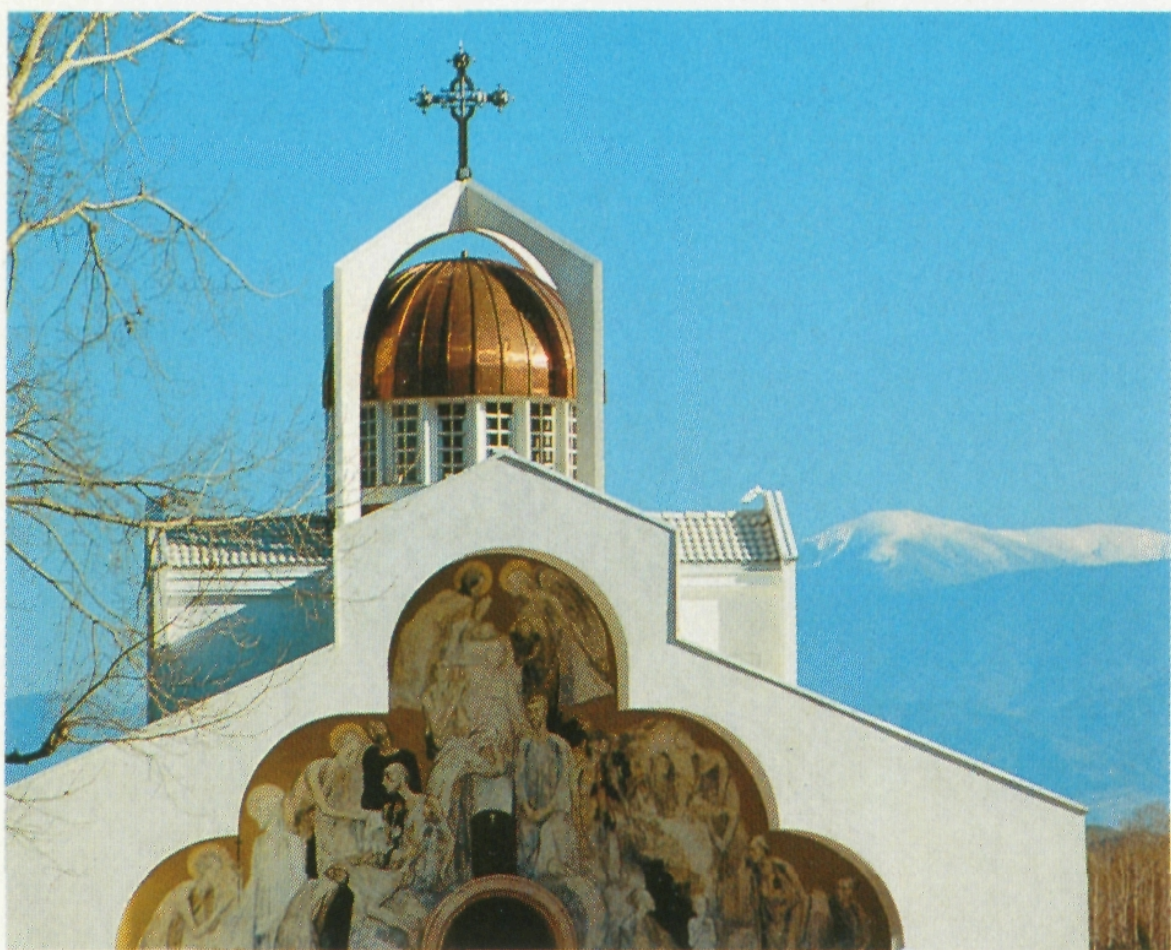
possession. The icon stand in the altar does not have panels with Bible scenes. Instead it features bunches of flowers gracefully carved in the soft wood. The big icon stand that measures 10.5 x 4.4 meters has perfect architectonics, tranquillity and balance of the horizontal and vertical segments; the relief parts are covered with magnificent carved lace work which abounds in ornamental motifs and is a real treasure store of figures and faces. All royal tier icons and most of the feast tier icons and of the apostles tier icons have been



painted by the painters who did the walls. The synthesis is rare and perfect.

The Chapel of SS Cosmas and Damian holds a fresh and vivid popular primitive, typical of carts and chests rather. The famous Iveron icon which is a replica of the original that is to be found in Mount Athos is additionally surrounded by ten small compositions in baroque frames. These compositions exemplify the miracle working nature of the icon. The boxtree icon stand at the altar chapel is a top achievement. The wood is a lace of panels and blocks which recreate numerous scenes from the Bible. This icon stand is a real treasure and its impact defies description. You have to see it.

Spa wise the Sandanski-Marikostinovo-Roupite-Petrich ring which is often referred to as the Bulgarian Climatic South is the gem of the region. It is a scenic locality surrounded by peaks that bask in the sun where the silvery thread of the river Strouma meanders to reach the warm Aegean Sea. Pirin casts off its alpine outlook to appear in a new queer garment. Autumn is particularly attractive: the cloudless sky is azure, the woods are clad in a fiery color vestment, the summer verdure still blends with the hues of the autumn poplar trees. Fruit is omnipresent to feast the eyes: big corn cobs, strings of tobacco leaves, balconies of bountiful golden apple harvest, vine pergolas bending with grapes clusters that the miracle of vintage will transform into thick red wine.



This is the Bulgarian region that is the richest in hot springs, about 80 spouting in the proximity of the Strouma mostly. The geyser mud deposit at Marikostinovo south of Sandanski is unique. It is a lake where hot water, 63°C, is discharged in an amount of 20 liters per second on curative mud; the mineral content of the water is low; the alkaline reaction is weak; the components are hydrocarbonates, sulfides and calcium. That combined method of mud and water treatment has been known since the days of the pharaohs and is extremely efficacious. The priceless springs of Roupite are 17 kilometers south of Sandanski, at the foot of Mount Kozhouh. The water temperature is 76°C; the discharge is 36 liters per second; the mineral content is low (2.134 g/l); the components are hydrocarbonates, sodium, silicon, fluorine and weak sulfides; the pH is the lowest in Bulgaria - below 6.5. The diseases that it can cure are multiple: of the digestive system, the liver, kidneys, endocrine glands and the stomach.

The water which is both hot and contains carbon dioxide is very rare and a real gift of nature. Apparently the greatest wealth of Roupite is the home of the Bulgarian clairvoyant Vanga. The queue of visitors is always there, waiting for advice, help and consolation. The church nearby that has been built specially for Vanga is lovely: the non-canonical frescos and altar icons received the admiration of some people and the indignation of others, as is the case whenever generally acknowledged rules are defied.

PETRICH

The southernmost Bulgarian town is a dynamically developing municipal center with 1901 inhabitants in 1936 and 26,491 in 1987.



It lies at the northern foothills of Belassitsa from where the fields can be seen as the eagles see them. The tall poplar tress along the road and the Petrich fruit trees look like blades of grass at the foot of an imposing mountain view. Petrich has a peculiar intimate atmosphere, yet in this country the word has come to be associated with orchards, greenhouses, peanut and tobacco plantations, and to be sure, vineyards as elsewhere in this region. Of the 148,000 hectares of vineyards in Bulgaria, 130,000 hectares are grown to the wine vine. Evidently



the vine grows well on the south-looking sloping ground, at an altitude of 600 meters at the most, and wants much sunshine to develop the sweet taste for a sum of 200°C produces 1% of sugar content. Bulgaria is lavishly endowed with all this, so together with Italy, France, Spain and the USA she is one of the Big Five holding 80% of the world's grapes export. Peanuts likewise want crumbling and fertile soil, sunshine and high temperature. The 1170 hectares produce some 11,000 tons. The Petrich peaches are famous. Peach is the fruit that ranks fourth in terms of the size of orchards.

The ancient Petra in the land of the Medes was mentioned by Titus Livius when he described the campaign of the Macedonian king Philip V against the Thracians in 183 BC. However, the world heard about Petrich in 1925 first owing to an accident at the Bulgarian-Greek border threatening to escalate into a war. The war was prevented by an inquiry commission of the League of Nations which ruled that Greece was to pay a compensation of 30 million and that was one of the major successes of the first international organization that had been founded and governed by a written charter, the League of Nations pact, that was an integral part of the 1919 Versailles Treaty, in the early stage.

A national sanctuary, the Samuilova Krepost (Samuil's Fortress) locality is nearby Petrich, in the gorge at the village of Klyuch. In late July 1014 the Byzantine imperial armies defeated the Bulgarians and took 15,000 prisoners of war. The emperor Basil who went down in history with the

epithet Bulgar Slayer ordered that all the men be deprived of their eyesight save for one out of every hundred to lead them to king Samuil. The king who otherwise was a man of iron could not endure the sight and died of a heart stroke on October 6, 1014. That was the end of a 34-year long battle between two titans and Samuil was invariably the one who triumphed in the first fifteen years. That period in Bulgarian history is known as the Western Bulgarian Kingdom. After Byzantium seized Danubian Bulgaria, Bulgarian sovereignty found refuge in Macedonia. Samuil's ascension to the throne was preceded by a number of intriguing events. Boris II was the first born son of king Peter and the grand-daughter of the emperor Lecapenus. She took the name Irene (peace) to mark the lasting peace between the two neighbors. A year after the coronation he was taken captive



and sent to Constantinople where he was humiliated and stripped of his insignia. After eight years of captivity he managed to run away but as he wore Byzantine garments, a ruthless Bulgarian arrow shot him dead at the border. His brother Roman had joined him in the flight. In addition to disgrace he had been through the horror of castration that had to end the dynasty. Samuil supported the fugitive. In 991 Samuil became king.

SANDANSKI

is a spa on motorway E-79, 173 kilometers away from Sofia. The journey in the south and the broad and fertile valley of the river Strouma bring in touch with a manifold world of unexpected charms. After the Kresna Gorge the river rushes to the village of Kresna which shines like a flower on the fragrant face of the

Sandanski-Petrich field against the majestic background of the evergreen Pirin with its snow-clad pinnacles.

If there is a Bulgarian town that tastes really of the south - heat, lights and whiteness - Sandanski is the place. The town of the sun surrounded by a blue wreath of mountains as on a child's picture seems to have been chiseled on the western slope of the Belassitsa. The main street which is lined by huge green spindles of slim cypress trees, the pyramidal symbols of the south, runs along the river. The air is bracing and smells of park; the whisper of an old woodland and the ripple of a crystal-clear mountain river enchant; houses rise on terrace sites and amidst verdure.

Thracians and Romans, Byzantines and Slavs, Bulgarians and Turks duly appreciated the generosity of this region and did their best to build a pleasant and helpful oasis. In the 2nd millennium BC

Thracians of the tribe Medes used the healing powers of the local springs. A settlement came into being, Medius by name, which is self-descriptive of its central location between the mountains Pirin, Ograzhden and Snezhanka. Aristotle, Thucydides and Pliny the Elder provide facts about the region Medica which is eponymous to Medus, son of Aegeus and Medea (heroes in the mythical journey to Colchis to fetch the Golden Fleece), and founding father of the tribe; Theseus who defeated the Minotaur was his brother.



The Romans called the town Dezudava. It was the venue of a big annual fair evidence of which is provided by a plaque of the patrician Flaviana Filocratia. The local archaeological museum standing on the ruins of an early Christian basilica has nice collections tracing the Roman times and Late Antiquity. A 5th-6th century floor mosaic with polychromatic combinations of geometric figures with old Christian symbols is the most impressive exhibit. An inscription testifies that the town was a bishop's see. The stone gallery with examples of Strouma tombstone carving is very original and said to have been the source of inspiration for a genius, the artist Vladimir Dimitrov, the *Master* in his effort to render the ideal Bulgarian type.

Khan Kroum reached the foothills of the Pirin Mountains at Sandanski during his campaign in 809. Thus the town entered the history of the Bulgarian state to which it was incorporated under khan Presian (836-852). The famous healers Cosmas and Demyan are said to have lived there in the 10th century. Brought up in Christian piety from an early age they studied the art of healing solely to help the fellow human beings. Their lives describe how they cured any disease and did not charge for that, hence the epithet the Silverless that was attached to their names while they still lived. Later they were canonized and the town was named after them and had that name until half a century ago.

During the Ottoman rule Sveti Vrach was a small village though a relatively busy marketplace. Water was appropriately used in keeping with the hygienic requirements of the Koran. There are two interesting monuments from that time. The Church of St George was built with donations and consecrated in 1861. It was different from contemporary houses of prayer as it was not half built deep into the ground; it was high and had a pompous staircase. There is an



interesting fountain under the shade of a six-century old plain tree with a plate which is a real masterpiece of architecture and can vie with the most original Bulgarian Revival period works of art.

After the Berlin Congress Sveti Vrach remained under Turkish rule for another 34 years. In 1894 it had 900 inhabitants. It regained freedom on October 20, 1912. In 1919 Melnik that was already declining transferred administrative functions onto Sveti Vrach. On April 19, 1929 it was made a town. The Simitli-Koulata railway was completed in 1945 and the Sandanski station was opened. The town grew quickly from 14,510 inhabitants in 1956 to 20,964 in 1977 to 23,846 in 1982.

The town has been named after Yane Sandanski (1872-1915), one of the most celebrated leaders of the Macedonian liberation movement. The cause was all that Yane had: it was his profession, wife, child, faith and the air that he breathed and the firm ground that he walked on. He was professional in every respect: cool in his judgment, precise in his action. He could fight endless battles with superior enemy without useless sacrifice; dozens of times had there been ambushes laid for him that he invariably and cleverly escaped. Sandanski's life borders on what can be read in fiction only: his actions seem to transcend what we believe is possible. He was a down-to-earth and harsh fellow who got involved in the making of one of the most romantic events of the day: the Miss Stone affair, the pompous entry into Thessaloniki during the Young Turk coup, the





storm of the sultan's palace in Istanbul and the ceremonious march of the Bulgarian revolutionaries that he led at the Blue Mosque.

In fact Yane was the only Bulgarian commander who entered triumphantly the millennial royal city, an eternal magnet for ambitious rulers of small and big countries. In 813 khan Kroum took his triumphant armies to the very walls of Constantinople. Five generations later king Simeon tried to conquer the great city where he had been educated at the Magnaura School in his young days. A thousand years later king Ferdinand of Bulgaria was obsessed with the mirage of the imperial throne. However, none of the Bulgarian rulers was fortunate enough to see his armies in the city but for the king of Pirin.

Sultan Abdul Hamid was deposed. He was taken away from his miraculous palace by car and nearly died as he was horrified by the roar of the engine for he had never seen a car before. The deposed man was a coward who was so much scared of dynamite that had his palace built on a rock and without any basements; he had a collection of 1000 pistols but could not shoot at all; he had 5000 thoroughbred Arab stallions that he never rode. One of the horses was presented to Yane who in 1912 entered Thessaloniki riding a white horse again, this time together with the Bulgarian liberation army. Three years later he was treacherously killed in Bulgaria by a Bulgarian.

Sandanski has as exceptionally salubrious climate with 2506 hours of sunshine and



mean annual temperature of 13.9°C , both of which make it the leader in the country. That temperature is not a result of scorching summer heat but of the 2.4°C in January and 24.6°C in July. The relative humidity of 67% is the lowest in the country; there is mist on 7.4 days a year, rain on 52.5 days and snow on 13.1 days. That region is the first to herald the spring in Bulgaria; around February 25 the temperature stays steadily over 10°C . There is more sunshine in summer than at the seaside. Autumn is incredibly mild; September is warmer than May; of the regions in this country October is the warmest month in that one; there is lovely sunny weather as late



as December 10. And as there is no winter in the proper sense of the word, the impression is of a transition from autumn to spring.

The parks which are huge for a town of this size are equally important. The beauty and harmony of Sveti Vrach are perhaps unrivaled among parks elsewhere in Bulgaria. On 40 hectares Boris Mitov's inimitable creative skill placed century-old sycamore trees, well laid alleys, flower-beds and green carpets, over 2000 ornamental bushes and trees and a curious rock garden. The town stadium, open air theater, swimming pool and a big pond are all in the verdure of the park. Another lovely woodland that encircles the town like a green hoof and imperceptibly links it up with the natural forests on the hillsides is east of the town, along both banks of the Sandanska Bistritsa, on an area of 170 hectares.

The ravages of time did not spare what human agony and hope built but faith in the healing power of the water survived and saved this paradise of nature. The twenty or so springs spout 1.8 million liters daily in two zones. The water temperature is very high (42-81°C) and the mineral content is low (0.627-0.653 mg/l), the alkaline reaction is weak, the water hardness is low. The local water has the highest content of metasiliconic acid among all Bulgarian springs. The water is translucent, colorless, odorless and pleasant to drink.

Longtime experience and systematic medical research have made Sandanski good for the cure and prevention of respiratory diseases.



Sunbathing, special route outings, kinesitherapy, inhalations with mineral water and herb infusions, hydrotherapy cure gastro-intestinal, metabolic neurological and women's diseases and disturbances of the bones, joints and muscles.

Millions recovered after a stay in Sandanski. Three balneological centers, a resort polyclinic, bathing areas with mineral water, drinking fountains and sanatoriums are at their disposal. The Sveti Vrach Hotel in the environs, a government residence until recently, is very posh. The Sandanski Hotel which is unparalleled in modernity in the Balkans in this specific kind of hotels is famous in the town. The modern 7-storey building with 600 beds, cozy restaurants and bars, outdoor and indoor pools and many playgrounds is in excellent harmony with the landscape. It owes its fame though

to the health center that seems to be lacking in nothing. Trusting Plutarch the local people believe that this was the birthplace of **SPARTACUS**.

Other world scholars also believe that the great Mede who led the revolting slaves that defeated six imperial armies before he was mutilated and slain in the battle at Apulia in 74 BC so that his body was never found, buried or dishonored, had lived around that ancient Thracian settlement.

Spartacus was born ca. 120 BC. There is evidence that in his young days as a member of a rich and notable family he studied Orphic,



Chaldean and Egyptian wisdom. For more than ten years he fought with Roman troops before he was taken prisoner in 89 BC and made a slave. It was the wars that recruited the class of slaves. Titus Livius, Plutarch and Appianus wrote that Emilius Paulus returned from his campaign in Epirus with 150,000 slaves; the wars of Marius against the Cimbri and Teutones brought another 150,000; Lucullus' expedition in Asia Minor brought such a mass of slaves that one cost as little as one dollar, in terms of purchasing power. During the rule of Augustus more than 900,000 out of the 1.5 million Romans were slaves.

But Spartacus was not! His rebellious soul told him to run away and for five years no one knew where he was or what he was doing. Detained again he became a gladiator in the school of Lentulus in Capua which used to be a rich and famous city and a rival of Rome in the time of Hannibal. Spartacus was one of the greatest men in that spectacular blood-

shed the origin of which is to be traced back ca. 264 BC. Originally several pairs of gladiators fought; the number grew and in the days of Julius Caesar 320 pairs fought on the arena at a time. It took Spartacus many years to organize it. He persuaded 78 gladiators to break out of the school. They took refuge in Vesuvius which had not erupted yet. Northwards he led a 120,000 man strong army.

Spartacus is a name that every pupil and literate man knows. Perhaps he is the only man about who more than thirty Antiquity authors wrote. He is not a fictitious hero from the classical mythology or a brainchild. Yet his battle to free the slaves assumed such grandeur that Spartacus was put on a par with mythical heroes and looked at as an equal to Prometheus and Hercules.

Useful Tips



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